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"I'VE COME BACK FOR YOU. I WANT TO—TO MAKE UP FOR THIS MORNING," JULIAN TOLD HER

WILD APPLES

A CALIFORNIA STORY

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE STRAIGHT ROAD"

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
C. E. CHAMBERS

[Cooke, G.]

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WILD APPLES

WILD APPLES

CHAPTER I

EXILE

HE lay in a patch of young wild oats, high on the flank of one of the mountains that shut in Siloam Valley, and gazed sullenly at the place of his banishment. If he had been a woman he would have wept; being instead nineteen years old and almost a man, he tried cursing half-heartedly under his breath.

Painted steeps, splotched with great swipes of burning orange California poppies, blue ground lupine; ranches spread map-like below; the stone dome of the Mission, nestled in a fold of the seaward hills; even the infinite reaches where the valley opened out grandly to the sea—the dazzling blue Pacific; he turned from the loathed beauty of it all, rolled over on his back and stared straight up into the clear zenith, black eyes introspective, black brows knotted in a frown that was more or less habitual. Julian McCulloch, son of Stephen McCulloch, the rich patent medicine man of Las Reudas and San Vicente, was trying, in the eternal dialectics of a boy's soul, to rebuild and put to the question what might be called a sort of first year in the valley when, recalling it now, he thought he should have been about seven.

His father and mother—they were the main figures in what he was remembering. Not exactly individuals; to the silly little scared sheep which he seemed to himself to have been they were just parents, and as such quite incomprehensible. His mother, at that time, he had thought very beautiful and wonderful; hard to please, but somehow she made him want very much to please her. He could always do it by being her angel-faced child. He must

have been born with a knowledge of the behaviour that suited her; he didn't remember being taught to take off his hat and keep it off when he spoke to any lady, to rise when she came into a room and remain standing till she was seated, to invariably use her name in addressing her—he just remembered doing it always, and his mother approving him, her friends praising him—fulsome praises that he could scarcely be said to have overheard, since they were quite outspoken in his presence, some of them fondling him, as his mother never did.

What a little monkey he had been at seven—at eight—nine—ten—anxiously exact in all the formulas of "preceding" and "following," the opening of doors, the carrying of wraps or parcels, rigmarole of salutation, of arrival and departure! He recalled with angry shame how he had liked the posturing and exhibiting, how he had lapped up the talk about his golden hair and black eyes, set off by a choir boy's white cotta and cassock. His hair was black enough now. He ran his hands through the thick, glossy mass that curled close and plumage-like to a well domed head, clutching and tousling it as he lay face upturned to the sky—thinking—thinking—thinking.

That first time—which of course was not a first time at all, but only stood out so in memory because it was the last time in all his knowledge of them when his father and mother had talked together, intimately, as other people's parents talked. They came by train to San Pablo. It was then as now Siloam's nearest railway point. On the train they turned him out of their section and made him go and sit quite at the other end of the car with the porter while they argued and argued excitedly, yet guardedly, as though there were something that must not be overheard. When they got to San Pablo, on the long drive across the range to the ranch, sitting with whoever it was that drove them (and he couldn't remember at all who that was) he was all ears to that vehement, cautious exchange of accusation and excuse between those antagonists on the back seat.

Supper over, the two had gone into his mother's room—which seemed at that time to be his father's also—and shut the door. He had cruised forlornly about outside. He felt that he ought to stay in the dining-room or kitchen where the servants who had been sent up ahead of them were busy; but he hung around, fascinated, though Heaven knows he could neither hear much

nor comprehend anything. Then, after a long, long time, his father looked out and called, "Julian," and he was ashamed of being caught. But his father didn't seem angry at that, albeit angry he certainly was, and with a strange, beaten air about him. He fixed his gaze on his only son and repeated, "Julian," adding, "come here."

When he got into the room, there was his mother looking very queer and excited—but very handsome, too. She called him over to her and took hold of his arm.

"It is clearly understood between you and me, Stephen," she spoke to his father above his head. He could not see her. "If we stay under the same roof; if there's no divorce—no scandal—I'm to be free in every way; exactly as much as though there had been a divorce."

"I said I'd split the property fifty-fifty with you," his father had said without looking at either of them. "That's more than any court would give you as alimony."

"Alimony!" his mother's voice was coldly scornful. "You know what I mean. You're to have nothing to say about the bringing up of this child." He felt her fingers tighten on his arm; she seemed to thrust him forward a little, at his father. "I won't have a man who—a man of such morals dictating the management of my son."

Not till long afterward did he know that morals were not a crime—only bad morals were objected to.

"You hear, Julian?"

"Yes, Mother."

"You understand?"

"Yes, Mother." He did not—but that was what she expected him to say.

"God, but you can rub it in, Nettie!" his father had muttered angrily; then, "That's the bargain. I have the name of keeping my word."

There was more—all mixed up. He was very sleepy. It was long past his usual bedtime. He had to drag his mind awake every minute. He wanted to go on with the mysterious, half-fearful thrill of an occasion which seemed to make him, Julian, of so much importance. But he couldn't keep awake. He fell asleep and woke up, fell asleep and woke up while his father and mother were talking of some one that she was angry about,

speaking so vividly that he thought this third person must be in the room with them.

He never knew when it all ended that night, or when he himself was undressed and put to bed. Both things must have happened after he went finally to sleep, for in the morning he waked in his cot out in the tent, and when he came into the house his father was not there. His mother always had a breakfast-tray in her room, and he looked eagerly in when it was carried to her. She was alone. She lay there in the big bed, a silken neglige pulled over her lacy white gown, a boudoir cap covering the dark hair. She called for him. He went and sat by her while she ate. She complained sharply of the food and scolded the girl. Her face looked bright and hard, somehow; but she didn't scold him. She kept looking at him and asking him so many questions about himself that he was fairly embarrassed. After a while she said her head ached and sent him away.

After his father's going there were no more such exciting occasions, and it seemed to the seven-year-old that he could only maintain his importance through the long, silky, cloying memories of his mother's nervous headaches, when he was called in from his solitary play to sit beside her in the darkened room, by appearing unnaturally sympathetic, holding her hand, watching her dim shape on the couch in its silken neglige, the hot water bag to the neuralgic temple—sitting there—sitting there—sitting there till his own head ached twice as hard. Sometimes she fretted and wanted him to be still. Sometimes she demanded speech, and he played up the best he could to the situation with, "I'm awfully sorry for your poor head—Mother. Does it hurt you very bad? I wish it could be mine that ached."

And then it was his that ached; and that would seem, in some way, satisfactory to his mother. He was proud of it, too, though old Ben Dye, the ranch manager, fussed and muttered about, "Rather see a kid of mine tied up by the thumbs than treated that way." Old Ben—to Julian Uncle Ben—spoke right out to his mother. He always called her Nettie—her full name was Antoinette Julian McCulloch—and she complained that he was too familiar, because he had known her when she was a little girl in Juneau, and he and Tom Julian, an older brother

who brought her up, and for whom her son was named, ran partners.

Julian knew, as a child does know things, that they were very rich. Yet, Thatcher Dye, seven years older than he, the only child Uncle Ben had left at home, the rest being married and gone out for themselves, was eagerly desired for a playmate. He was a big boy who had to work. They kept cattle on the ranch then, and Thatch was aureoled by the glory that rings a cowboy. His mother forbade his being much with Thatcher Dye. There was no reason given. She just objected. So, while she was, as she said, "too miserable to go anywhere or want to see anybody," he hung around alone.

There was a magnificent great million-dollar hotel at Liveoak, with the best golf links and polo field in the state and innumerable tennis courts. Athletic events were pulled off there. In former years his father who was something of an amateur athlete came down for these. Also they used to take a fast team and make a long drive to one of the big ranches or country places out beyond San Pablo when there was a house-party. But the regimen for Julian even then had been cast iron—early hours, special diet, outdoor sleeping. He couldn't go in the surf with the other children. It made him ashamed to be with them at all. He was taught swimming in the warmed baths at Liveoak, and he was told at every turn that his uncle, Thomas Jefferson Julian, had died of consumption.

He could remember scared hours in the dark trembling at that thought. Now he rolled over and raised his head to face the valley, beating with an angry fist on the ground. Poor little devil of a snivelling kid—scared of death—scared of life—crawling around hypnotised on the idea of pleasing somebody by making a monkey of himself! He stared down toward the McCulloch ranch; a great straggling, brown bungalow-built house—its very walls ought to remember the dejection of those days. The place was neglected now, his mother hadn't cared to come here for three years. Uncle Ben let the gate lie when it fell off the hinges. But to Julian there was always a six or seven-year-old boy, very beautifully dressed, haunting around somewhere in the place, watching the dust of a departing rig that carried his parents down the road, afraid to go back in the house where there were only some newly hired servants,

getting what sense of human companionship he could from watching passers-by, smiling at them, so that they often waved at him, or even hailed him; he was not allowed to speak to persons he didn't know.

Sometimes these passers-by would be Spanish or Portuguese from away up at the upper end of the valley where the road whiffled out of sight and lost itself among the Santa Monicas, and Uncle Ben said the land was too poor to raise anything but a crop of wildcats. Black-eyed, black-moustached fellows in angora chaps and tall, silver-corded sombreros, they rode down on ratty little pinto ponies, or they came driving great wood wagons with four and six horses, arches of bells on the leaders because of the hairpin turns where the road was cut high in chalk rock with a scarey drop of a hundred and fifty feet to the river below. When he dared he had called "Hello," and when he dared not he had just wondered about them. They often had their women and children with them on these wagons, They laughed, or seemed out of spirits. Late Saturday nights he had been waked in his tent by some of them passing along the road whooping drunk. But the place where they lived remained almost unknown to him; he hadn't been there three times in his life.

That summer of long ago and the summer that was to be swam together in Julian's mind. He stared at the valley where the road, a ribbon of tan, threaded everything up for him. There was one of those fellows on it now, toylike, winding home—an empty wagon, of course. He was near the McCulloch gate. But this evening there would be no small boy hanging on it, watching the dust where his parents drove away together behind a spanking team, longing to have them notice him and maybe take him around with them to the places they went, not so much for the going—but that he dreaded so horribly the being left behind.

Does everything you want in this world—and get—turn out to be a curse? When his mother was better of her headaches, or as old Ben said "of her pouting," she chose to be very gay on her own account, going about with the people in Siloam. Yet that bargain which he had not understood at the time except that it seemed to make him important in his own eyes, and for the first time in his life important in the eyes of his parents,

apparently concerned the thing he had so passionately desired; for now he was taken everywhere with her, when it was a daylight affair. If she went at night she'd have him in to see her in her beautiful dress before she started, and he tried hard to dig up the right thing to say—and do—and be—that he might hang on to these unbelievable new privileges. He could only guess what was wanted of him, but his whole heart was set on being it, whatever it was. He never whimpered now at being left alone. If he had trouble getting to sleep out there in the tent by himself, he occupied his mind with anxious plans to hold her favour. It was disconcerting when she noticed how alone he seemed to be and invited in a bunch of children of proper parentage and manners from among the summer visitors in Siloam Valley. He couldn't help going back into his shell. The occasions—several in all—were dismal failures. He despaired utterly of explaining to her that the thing couldn't be done that way. She scolded him, forgot all about it, and went on to her own amusements.

Lying there on the mountain flank remembering, the boy's mouth twisted to something between a smile and a sneer. How hard he had tried; what pains he'd gone to, sometimes making his mother angriest by the very thing he thought would please her! The sneer had it as he recalled how quakingly scared he had been when his father suddenly appeared at the ranch in the fall to take them home. He needn't have been afraid. Indeed his popularity with his mother, which had seemed to be settling down a bit, was brightened up by the arrival. His father was put in one of the ranch guest rooms, clear at the other end of the house, and the one night he was there Julian's cot was carried in and set in his mother's room.

His father's air was defiant. The next morning, with their wraps on and almost ready to go, he said something queer about why he had come. "Just as well not to take the whole of Siloam Valley into your confidence," he had jerked out. Julian's mother had pulled him to her, absently putting on his hat which she held in her hand, and which he immediately took off, since they were still in the house. She answered with veiled eyes and an odd, aloof voice which he was to know henceforth as the one reserved for his father, and all his father's doings:

"Very well, Stephen. I have no objection to your be here so long as you keep your word about Julian."

He remembered the thrill of it. It seemed somehow being in a play on the stage. The carriage was waiting. U Ben or Thatch had taken the hand luggage to it. His fat should have walked out with them; but he stood a minute s ing at his wife and son. His answer, when it came, had see a bit of reality dropped into the midst of make-believe. It one word, "Hell!" uttered as he tramped out and banged door behind him. Julian ran to open it again for his mothe

If he had dreaded to lose his new importance when they back to Las Reudas that Fall, his fear proved groundless. mother still paid an almost disconcerting amount of atten to him. He began to know dimly what the bargain betw herself and his father was going to mean—to him, anyb She might have been said to parade him. He connected her haviour with his father's complaint that she "rubbed it in."

His quarters were unchanged, a big, pleasant room wit open fire and a sleeping porch that jutted out above the riage porch and the brick drive. But where his father mother had had the second floor front rooms, with an ou over the gardens and the avenue beyond, his father now mysteriously domiciled on the third floor in luxurious bac apartments: bedroom, den, bath, and a small gymnasium.

He didn't remember that, before this time, his mother a suite in the apartment house—the Antoinette—which owned in San Vicente. She had now. He didn't think father's foot had ever crossed the threshold of it; but used to live there for a week at a time when there was c in town, or she was having a session with her dressmaker. or twice she had had a bed made for Julian on the couch i living-room; more often he had been given a place in other apartment for her convenience. He had memorie going, a small boy, to speak to his mother there of a mor finding her still in bed with a wonderful lace cap on, a de negligée drawn over her gown.

There was nothing else on that third floor of the Las R home but the trunk room where the empty baggage was s and a bit of sloping attic that held an old square pian other disused relic furniture.

And since his father had moved in there, that part of the world—the attic—a small boy's delight—was denied. He hadn't put in a strenuous summer studying her preferences without knowing that. If he went up there, he slunk when he thought she was out of the house. If she caught him coming down from the place she always asked sharply if his father was in—if he had been invited to go up there—and what he had been doing.

And he always gave a straight, dutiful account—like an urchin who opens a dirty fist to show the hoarded pebbles and shells in it—after which they are no longer of interest and can be thrown away—and he is sent to wash his hands. Spiritually speaking, in those days after his mother had really taken hold of him, it seemed to Julian that he was always being sent to wash his hands. If he ever got hold of anything he cared for—throw it away, and wash them.

Back of the McCulloch home on the Avenue at Las Reudas the ground fell away in a manner so unsightly as to make lots of little value. Out of sight, around the turn of the arroyo, skulked the garbage dump with its skeleton frames of old bed springs, its myriad scattered bottles and tin cans. A sort of street, nameless so far as he knew, held the homes of operatives in his father's factory. Men and boys in overalls, women and girls in gingham and shabby sweaters, they streamed from the tenements to the big building where the Specific was mixed and bottled, wrapped, packed and shipped, pouring in and out, in and out, of the yard gates as though the factory were some sluggish monster that breathed them thus to furnish its life. Daggett's Grocery on one corner seemed to captain the waste of dirty shacks, homes of factory hands, day laborers, Japs and Chinese, that stretched in unrelieved ugliness clear across the creek hollow to the rising ground where the eucalyptus planting began.

His sleeping-porch overlooked all this. He seemed to spend a good deal of time in his cot on that porch these days—by order of his mother, as it were—he didn't feel ill, yet there was a white-capped nurse with him sometimes, who would have been rather a cheerful person if she hadn't been so intrusive, with her glass of hot milk every so often or the more infrequent

and loathed cod liver oil emulsion. He was told that he
growing too fast.

He studied the back streets. They swarmed with childr
There was a public school near; you heard its bell and
some of them going with books. More went to the factory.
could hear its whistle, too, and see the smoke from its
chimney over beyond the trees. He had never been to
school of any kind. It was tutors and special coaches for
When he felt like it he learned readily, and then would c
these times when they said he had over-studied and he lay in
cot on the sleeping-porch and the white-capped nurse fed
nauseous emulsions, and his mother talked about his Uncle
dying of consumption. It seemed indeed a dreary thing
your body would grow too fast, and your mind would l
too much—and there was nothing for it but a cot and
liver oil.

He didn't believe those boys down there had any such p
lems. He made up his mind to go and see. When he go
from one of these unreal occasions, and they brought Chapo
the ranch for him to ride, it was straight into the hinterlan
the back streets that he galloped. Down there the pony's b
skin coat, its sweeping white mane and tail made an impres
He stored some memories to take back with him. The y
wolf Dip Savage had chained up in his back yard was on
these. It snapped at everybody. Dip said it wanted bl
meat to eat—"live meat" he thrillingly put it. The apricot
in the back yard of the Daggett Grocery, always full of club
brickbats and old boots where the hungry vandal hordes o
neighbourhood had beaten the high branches for spoil,
to the size of an oak; it bore such fruit as there was o
other tree. Ben Dye, when he came up from the ran
plant some fruit trees in the side yard of the McCulloch
sion, had looked at it and said there was something abou
swag of the land that fed and nourished it.

The swag of the land fed and nourished the apricot
the bats and clubs of the neighbourhood beat the fruit o
branches before it was ripe. Such was life in the gulch.
the oldest Willis boy, Oliver, got killed down there b
falling in of a tunnel that Ollie and the Daggetts and
Savage and some others were digging in a bank for a ro

cave. It seemed to be a region in which things happened, where you might meet life in the raw.

He came back from it more than once covered with mud that had been thrown at him in the direct, free expression of class prejudice; but he had heard a new kind of talk, a speech pregnant, elliptical, that borrowed nothing from books, and was as different as possible from the thin, silken *patois* of the society for which life on the hill was trying to prepare the heir of the house of McCulloch.

When his mother—quite by chance—found out, he was punished, and a ban laid upon the hollow back of the house forever. He was not to go down there on any pretext, for any reason. Punishment was growing to be pretty frequent for him. His mother had specialised on his music. Very early he had the best training the Coast could afford. She took a pride in his proficiency. Sometimes he worked hard at it to please her; sometimes a thing that had been chosen for him, thrust upon him, palled, and he failed her. Her way of punishing him was to give him a thorough, cold talking to, remind him of everything she had done for him, how much she had noticed him, how much she took him about with her, the interest she showed in him. This had been going on for a good many years, rolling up an enormous debt against him, and a debt that it seemed had to be paid by devotion on his part. When she'd talk to him that way it made him take stock of his actual feelings—and he found no real devotion. At first he was frightfully ashamed of this, and then it roused an unspoken resistance—a sort of dumb defiance. If he was so hopelessly behind, anyhow, he could never expect to get straight with her.

Does everything you want in this world—and get—turn out to be a curse? He came to regret the old days of neglect. There was no chance for that now. Life skirmished along, a fight with his mother usually ending in a draw; she didn't make her point, and he had gained nothing. Yet, he was with her all the time, he was pushed into a prominence that was sometimes hateful.

It was after his voice broke and he could no longer be in the choir, he was turned fourteen, that he first had really big rows with her. Lying here on the flank of old Bitter, looking up at the sky, he gave the matter deep attention. Yes, it was

about then that his mother's management of him, the life she offered began to seem utterly silly. He couldn't understand it himself. He seemed to be a different person. He was visited by raw, queer impulses; not to answer when he was spoken to; not to do a thing simply because he was told to do it; to hurt somebody's feelings. Right in the middle of some affair, when he was going along pretty well, queer shames and chagrins would sweep over him—for nothing. For nothing he would burn with intolerable resentment at words said to him or hands laid upon him.

One such occasion out of many stood suddenly and ludicrously forth in his mind. They were getting up a big show for charity, with classic dancing; they had been rehearsing out at the house in costume—sandals and tunics; fillets round their heads; some women, friends of his mother's, for audience and critics. There were a lot of them in it, boys and girls that belonged to the dancing class, the social set his mother proposed for him. He was feeling kind of queer and excited, anyhow; as though he'd like to chuck the whole thing and get out. They talked too much about your looks. It made him uncomfortable, the way they stared, and praised. He stood it till one of them said he was like a young Greek god. He felt himself get hot all over, and knew he was blushing. Then his mother spoke, "Stand there against the light, Julian. We want to see your profile." He hadn't any idea of what he was going to do till he had blurted out, "Oh, rot!" and was bolting from the room. He locked himself in upstairs and wouldn't come down again. He stood in front of his mirror and looked at that thing with the painted face that was his reflection in it, and wouldn't answer the angry rapping on his door. He tore the costume getting it off, and took a lot of the skin off his face along with the make-up.

He was in the show, all right, in the end. Oh, yes, he was in that show. The dancing teacher wasn't particularly nice at him, but the occasion seemed to be the real beginning of his mother's merciless, infernally long-winded punishment. She showed a cold persistence that went beyond anything one could have imagined. In the old time, when he failed to please her, she had been hard, yet she forgot about it soon and went on to her own affairs. But now he was one of her affairs.

weeks after that outbreak she wouldn't give him a good word or a direct look; he existed in a world of icy displeasure. She cut off every privilege; life wasn't worth having. Yet he couldn't apologise as he had once done. He couldn't crawl and whine. It made him think of Dip Savage's wolf.

Does everything you want in this world—and get—turn out to be a curse?

He looked back to seasons at Tahoe, the Yosemite, Coronado, winters at home in Las Reudas or San Vicente, at Los Angeles or San Francisco. His mother's interest in life was society. His days and nights were a procession of such social functions, which came more and more as the years went on to be practically the same as hers—balls, musicales, luncheons and outings of the Junior set, motor trips where you couldn't be alone for a minute to enjoy anything, but were desperately, almost agonisingly alone in the middle of a noisy crowd. People, places, enterprises, they got past him, empty of any significance as he travelled in his mother's wake, or in the path set him, dinned upon, deafened, unable to find a friend anywhere because he had so many acquaintances.

And there were times when he was trailed about humiliatingly from one lung specialist to another, because he was still growing too fast; put through whatever regimen the specialist of the moment prescribed; pushed in his studies and then, just when they were getting interesting, his tutor would be laid off. It had come to be that he and his mother quarrelled more or less all the time. She still watched jealously to keep him from his father; the one thing they were almost unconsciously agreed upon was to hide their wranglings from him.

This was easy enough. Stephen McCulloch moved on the horizon of his son's life, an enigmatic figure, coming and going, an alien presence; rarely offering speech or comment on anything in the home. The intercourse between Julian and his father was strictly formal, cool and slightly sarcastic on the man's side, as though Julian were a young fellow whom he had met for the first time and did not regard very favorably; bewildered and uncommunicative on the boy's part, with an underlying, disheartened wistfulness toward his father's grim efficiency, a certain rough and ready masculinity about him. Was there the thing that he, Julian, needed, and was missing?

Below him as he lay now, showing how he had got to his perch, was a low nondescript roadster. He and Calkins, his tutor, had left San Vicente in the little car this morning, and made the valley by noon. He'd have had to come by train and ship the machine, if good old Calk hadn't spoken up for the drive. The machine was his in a sense that almost nothing else was; for he had had a hand in building it. Up to a month ago, Thatcher Dye had been working in Las Reudas as chauffeur for the McCullochs. It was he who had planned the little car; it was set on the chassis of an old imported racer that had once belonged to Julian's father, and equipped with expensive appliances from half a dozen old cars gathered up from the garage at home in Las Reudas or bought from the auto wreckers. Though she had had Ben Dye's son board out of the house, and set other distances and restrictions between him and her own, Thatch hadn't lasted long as chauffeur with his mother. There was a Jap in the place now, a pert, cheeky fellow who wore his uniform smartly, and could no more have put a machine together than he could speak straight English.

The building of the roadster, trying it out, took Julian once more into The Land of Back Streets.

Taught and trained with reference always to surface, a process, as he understood it, that was called making a gentleman of him, he found he didn't fit in anywhere. If you asked him (and something inside did keep asking, always) he was a queer, misshapen individuality, unlike everybody else in the world. He had nothing in common with his mother's crowd; contact with them was like brushing an eyeball. Again he tried the gang in the hollow. His mother was giving a big reception. He utilized his chance of being out of the house till late by gathering a bunch of the back street crew and examining the question of how it would feel to be drunk. All he found to condemn, even now, was the folly of the thing. He had only been experimenting. What he said to himself was—how can you tell that you always wanted to be sober, unless you try once anyhow, getting thoroughly lit up? Well—he tried. And he had the luck to stagger into his mother's dining full of guests, completely spiffed!

Of course after that there was nothing to do but shut mouth and take what she chose to give him.

spoke once. It was when he found this was going to cost him the trip to Alaska. He could hear himself now telling her that she'd be sorry sometime; he could hear her answering that it was all children did—make their parents sorry that they ever were born.

She wouldn't let up an inch. She was only too well suited. She didn't want a grouchy, queer nineteen-year-old son with her in the East, at the seaside resorts and in Canada, where it turned out she was now going. She packed him off to the ranch so quickly that it was only lying here this evening on the mountainside that he finally realised: his father was back and forth between California and Juneau all summer, and every summer; she had killed two birds with one stone; got rid of him so far as she was concerned, but guarded against his being with his father in her absence.

He threw his head up suddenly and looked about him. How late it was! The toy-like wood-wagon must be nearly home by this time. Who would meet its driver? Did he love the people he lived with—or quarrel with them? He had seen the Bruckner cows, looking from this distance like a flock of pied specks herded by one larger and two smaller specks, as they moved along the road being turned from pasture to milking lot by the vaquero and his dogs. Thatch went with Alma Bruckner. Having lost his place as the McCulloch chauffeur, he was starting a repair garage in San Vicente. He was up here in the valley now, trying to raise some capital. Of course he wanted to come up and see Alma, too.

Lights began to wink down there. One was in an old adobe at the foot of the Pollard pasture, where nobody lived. Oh, he remembered . . . the vacation camp for working girls. . . . Miss Dale Pollard, who was on the San Vicente *Messenger,* raising money for it. The old square piano from the attic at home had been sent down to it.

There were lights at the Pollard ranch. Paula Pollard and Zoe Haslett, who was visiting her, had met them in the road when he and Calkins came up the valley at noon and invited them to a beach party and a swim with the crowd to-morrow. Calkins could go if he wanted to. Julian remembered the crowd of old. They were the ones, some of them, that his mother had dragged in for him to chum up with in past years. Well,

he certainly wouldn't play the fool going around with them now when there was nobody to make him.

Paula Pollard. In those days she and her father had lived, winters, in his Las Reudas house next to the McCulloch place. Paula was one of the dancing class girls. She had been out at the house that day the woman called him a Greek god and he said, "Oh, rot." At that time it had seemed that she was older than he, but last winter, having been in a Washington boarding school while her father was serving in Congress, she had come back to San Vicente a year younger. Said she was only eighteen, but she did the society like a veteran. When she met them to-day she said that Benchy Prentiss was in the valley for Easter vacation with two young fellows from Stanford. He wished they'd let him alone. He wanted to be by himself. That's what had brought him up here on the mountain—to get off by himself, where nobody could follow.

He had been like a bear with a sore head all the way down from San Vicente; but never a chirp out of Calkins, except to give him a good word on his driving now and then, or mention that the Highway made motoring fine. They both knew that the tutor was sent along as a policeman—an insult—that he would be sent down in the fall to fetch Julian back in the same way. But Calk was all right; Calk could never be an insult. It had been a breakneck business getting the roadster up on old Bitter—he supposed he was the first that had ever taken a machine so high. It was mean as dirt to the good little old boat; but that's the way he felt; like being mean to something, hurting something. It would be as much as his life was worth to get down. The danger was doubled if he stayed until after dark; so he rolled over on his back again and lay staring up at the sky while the afterglow died out along its blue, twilight came slowly as it does over those western waters, and finally great white stars looked down at him.

Oh, God, what was life—death—anyhow? The world-pa engulfed him, a mighty ache, the great, unformulated arrai ment of youth that finds the framing of things all wrong.

Why hadn't he been born to people who really wanted chi —who liked them? There was Uncle Ben—he thought Ben must be a failure so far as money was concerned ing on in the house as a sort of caretaker when the p

were all rented; doing his own cooking; couldn't get the money Thatch needed—but this evening at dinner when Thatch sat with his head down and seemed discouraged, Uncle Ben kept looking at him—such a look! Never in his life had anybody looked at Julian that way. Red-headed Benchy Prentiss, who would be at the beach party to-morrow; when they were all in that show together Benchy's strong, slightly bowed legs hadn't suggested any Greek gods to the ladies; but he and his mother romped like a couple of playmates. She was the widow of a Stanford professor. He had seen Benchy pick the little woman up and carry her laughing and protesting all around the room.

He had a vision of his own mother and himself. She was tall —but he was taller. She was very handsome. He knew that now—very stately, too. After the first few years when he got utterly discouraged about pleasing her and rows were a regular thing between them, his favourite meditation had been of how bad she might feel at his funeral. Death—it is what a poor beset youngster inevitably comes back to when life pinches too hard. He'd thought a lot about it; but if he could die now, by simply turning over his hand—would he? He was conscious of an intense, unsatisfied curiosity that would not have let him go so. No, he had been sullen under the regimen; but he didn't want to die. He didn't want to die, anyhow, before he had tried out life. This wasn't life. There must be something he could find for himself.

That was the last he remembered till he roused to the feeling of the dew on his hair. His coat sleeve was all damp. When he got up and went down to the roadster its leather cushions were swimming wet. He sopped them off with a big handkerchief, snapped on his lights and coasted down in enjoyable danger.

It was near midnight when he turned in at the McCulloch gate. His eyes, accustomed to the dark, could see the mass of shadow that was the house, and a blaze of illumination showed that somebody had the lights going in the dining-room. The gate was open, but the roadster made so much noise going up the rise of the drive that whoever it was came and stood in the dining-room door.

"That you, Jule?" It was Dye's voice.

"Yes, Uncle Ben."

"You'll have to leave your Go-devil under the big oak there. We didn't get the garage cleared for you yet."

He ran the roadster to the spot indicated. There was no use covering it. It couldn't be wetter. No dew fell under the big tree.

"Girls been phonin' about that picnic to-morrow," old Ben's voice came to him rather plaintively. "Invited Mr. Calkins—an' even invited Thatch—so as to fill up your little old Go-devil an' have you drive for 'em in the big car."

"Thatch can drive them." Julian was coming down into the light. He spoke brusquely, ungraciously.

"Well, you wasn't here—an' that's what they wanted—to have you drive 'em," old Ben persisted. "It's all fixed up now, Jule. Guess you can't get out of it."

The old man in shirt and trousers continued to stand in the lighted doorway, his carpet-slippered feet set a little wide. Julian could see how his scanty greying hair was all stuck up in little points where he had rubbed his head when he roused at the noise of the machine. The yard was still in wild disorder, where he had made hasty, slovenly preparation to receive them; some of the furniture standing out in it getting drenched with the dew. When he and Calkins arrived at noon, Julian's sleeping tent had just been pitched, its cot got in and made. Uncle Ben said he had trouble getting help; but Estancio, the Spanish boy, had hung around Julian and carried things for him and waited on him. Estan was after the tip, of course. Well, he got it. Julian always had plenty of money to spend. As he was going to his tent now old Ben called again:

"Something in a bowl on the table for you, covered so the cats wouldn't get at it."

"Thank you, Uncle Ben." But Julian went on into the tent, undressed and lay down. He had just reached out and snapped his light off when he heard shuffling footsteps crossing the yard toward him, and the old man spoke outside the tent curtains.

"Ain't you goin' to take that stuff?"

Julian's answer was to switch the lights on. Dye put an anxious, half angry face inside to announce,

"That diet card your mother sent me called for half a can of the dope mixed with an e-qual quantity of new milk—to be

taken on retiring. I mixed it as per schedule, an' set up to see that you had it—offered to you, anyhow."

"Oh, well, I'll come over and eat some, I suppose—if you sat up for me."

"Needn't on my account." Dye let himself quite into the tent now and stood a minute, rubbing his chin, uncertain and half defiant. Finally,

"Jule, boy"—it was almost a whisper—"what did your mother send you up here for, 'stead of lettin' you go to Juneau?"

Silence. Then the old voice, half pleadingly,

"Was it—'count o' the climate?"

"No. Something I did." He had meant to be very quiet; but under old Ben's sympathetic eyes a heat flared up in him and made him say, "She knew I wanted to go to Alaska more than I ever wanted anything in my life. I've been wanting to go for years. She just liked to hit me where it would hurt worst;" and then was a little ashamed of having spoken so.

"Uh-huh," Dye nodded. "Know how you feel. Boy o' your age—certain localities do call 'im. The north's called you—like it called your Uncle Tom."

Julian said nothing, and gazed steadily at the tent wall.

"See here, boy; does your mother scare you with talk about your Uncle Tom dying of consumption?"

"It doesn't scare me—particularly. She says a good deal about it."

"Well——" The old man broke off and frowned helplessly a minute, concluding with a bolt: "Look-a-here, Jule. You know your Uncle Tom an' me ran partners. He come to the Coast from Virginia on account of his lungs—that's true. But by the time I first knew him he was as sound and well a man as I was myself. Over six feet; black as a Mex. You've got the look of him."

Again he broke off.

Julian lay back on his pillows and waited. That was what his mother said: that he was like his Uncle Tom. That was the way she began and ended her talk about his health.

"Jule, I'm a-goin' to trust you, like I'd have trusted Tom himself; and I'd 've trusted him with my life. I'm a-goin' to tell you somethin' that your mother's always kep' quiet.' The

old man came across and stood over him, looking down at him as he lay.

"My, but you're long! Six foot—ain't yuh?—an' not twenty yet! I could think 'twas Tom himself, in this light. Now—at that there picnic to-morrow you'll kind of hate it about not goin' in with the others, an' havin' to eat different—huh?"

"Not much. I don't care—much—for that."

The old man chuckled.

"I see," he said. "I see."

"It's nothing to me what they think. It isn't that."

Again the old man chuckled.

"An' you won't tell on me? Lord! I know you won't. You don't have to tell everything you know. Tom, for all the world; them girls—out after ye a'ready. Minded me—— Your uncle wasn't to say a ladies' man, Jule, but lemme tell you now, every woman's head would turn when he come into the room. He was the best kind of a man's man. If he drank—and he did, sometimes—I never seen him when he couldn't carry his liquor. If he lost at poker—everybody gambled more or less in Juneau, them days—he was a good loser." He shook his head a little, softly. "Big, still, black feller—kep' everybody guessin', and done his own thinkin', an' said, 'Yes' an' 'No' . . . an' the world could fall while he stuck to it. Ah, Lord! I sure loved that man. I cried like a baby at his funeral."

He pulled up suddenly. Julian watched his face.

"Yuh see, his wife had went first; with a pore little baby that didn't live. I was the one that picked him up off'n her grave, stone dead. Your mother—you know how she is—wanted it hushed up, as collapse of the lungs. I didn't see as that was any harm; but if she's goin' to get you buffaloed about inheritin' consumption—well—that's different again."

"He didn't die of consumption? What killed him?" The little tent in the sheltered valley was very still. It was as though the night and the world drew back, finger on lip, hearkening for the answer to that question.

"A bullet from his own gun. He'd shot himself—on her grave."

At the words, at the knowledge they brought, it was as though Julian's flesh were suddenly illumined from head to foot; a flood of light that began in his very toes and finger ends surged

to his heart, welled up out of it and flowed over the whole world! He wasn't conscious till afterward of Uncle Ben saying good-night, of his answering and thanking the old man. He did do that. More than once he said, "Thank you, Uncle Ben—thank you," as the old man got himself out of the tent, leaving Julian alone—with the great new Fact.

Lying there long, long in the dark, he saw what life might mean—with love. Out of a mangled past—his father and mother alienated, jealous, bitter, squabbling over him—he yearned toward this thrilling thought of the big, dark man who had gone before, a free soul, who had said his "Yes" and "No," who had carried his liquor, whom the eyes of women had followed unasked, who had chosen his own time to die—on the grave of the one woman. The romance of that clutched hard at the heart of nineteen.

The threat that had been used to whip him into line was more than half lie. He too, before he died, might taste life—real life—not made up and offered to him, thrust upon him; not stale stuff such as he had been let in for to-morrow; not people who would take him at the old estimate. He knew well enough how to snub them and be done with them. There must be something, somewhere, that was his—intended for him—that he could seek and find.

The last thing within his vision as he drifted off in sleep, the picture of Siloam Valley as he had looked at it with the sunset light on it, came before his closed eyes now in triumph and beauty. Again the road threaded up his world for him. Again the sunset light flamed on the Mission. Again the eternal question of the sea spread to the horizon. But now it spread there with an implication of answer—of satisfaction.

CHAPTER II

LYNNIE WILLIS

THE recollection that had gone with Julian into sleep—the remembrance of what old Ben had told him—was warm and vital at his heart next day. If he only could have got away by himself with it—down the coast to Wolf Canyon, or into the hills at the head of the valley! But no, here was this bore of a beach party on hand.

After breakfast, Thatch over at the roadster getting off a tire that had a slow leak in it and putting the spare in its place, Uncle Ben and Calkins back in the house, there sounded, far down the road, the long, chittering whimper of an exhaust horn.

"Heh—she's after you early," Thatch called.

Julian glanced at his watch and started into the tent for his cap, asking over his shoulder,

"What kind of a car's she got?"

"The first Cadillac they made. Her dad sure bought it out of a junk shop for her; and she'll pack about sixteen into it." Thatch grinned at him. "You'll have fun driving it—I don't think."

The car came to the gate below, and stopped noisily. Paula, behind the wheel, noting that Julian made no haste, sounded the horn at him again; and Zoe Haslett, standing up, catching sight of his white flannels, began to hum, "Here comes the bride."

As he walked slowly down the slope, he looked at them and past them. As in last night's vision, Siloam was glorious, with a light wind going under a blue sky; but these were not the people with whom he could share the gift of new life that had come to him. No, no; nothing which belonged to the old days was going to hold over with him. Somewhere, somehow, he would find his own.

"Hurry up, Jule." Paula, an old silk dust cloak pulled on over her swimming gear, moved across and left the wheel for him.

She took Zoe on her lap—Zoe still humming the wedding march, looking like a saucy boy in her one-piece swimming suit and scarlet cap. "Hurry, please; we've got all the rest of 'em to pick up."

Calkins came out on the porch and called good morning to them while Julian was getting in. A pleasant, round-faced, near-sighted old young man, he moved with a slight halt.

"We'll be at the beach ahead of you, then," he said. "Dye's going to stop at the garage and vulcanise a tire. I'll walk on down and make the fire."

"Awfully good of you," Zoe piped, as Julian started up the ancient cripple.

They went from ranch to ranch, gathering the load Thatch had predicted; Julian had a sense of sympathy with the machine he drove; it was certainly a gallant old pile of junk; the way it staggered and moaned and managed to keep out of the ditch was a miracle.

Of the tanned, half-nude, loud-talking young people who soon packed it, some belonged to the valley, others were down from Stanford, and others from the San Vicente Normal for the Easter vacation. Finally they had five girls in the back of the machine, and four young fellows swinging on the running-board; talking all over him, he paying no attention except when they bawled directly at him. They were dressed, or rather undressed, for the swim. Did they use to get themselves up as near naked as this? He supposed so; but to Julian, the air did seem rather unnecessarily full of bare legs, unclad feminine knees and elbows. When Zoe's plump elbow came slamming over against him where the road was rough, Paula twitched her around straight, with,

"For goodness' sake, Zoe! Nobody could drive with you falling on them like a ton of brick every three minutes. I'm furious if any one touches me when I'm at the wheel. You'll make Julian wish he had gone in his own machine."

"Sure—why wouldn't he?" Benchy Prentiss yipped. Bench's voice had two registers; one squeaked and the other roared. "Way Calkins and Dye sailed past us made the old Cad look like she was standing still," he rumbled out a conclusion.

"The Cad's a guessing contest, anyhow," giggled Zoe Haslett.

"Yes, but I notice you're glad enough to fall back on it," Paula snapped, "when other things fail you."

Zoe's sunburned face reddened.

"Did other things fail her?" asked one of the Hannon twins.

"Are the Consadines at Liveoak?" the other one added quickly.

"No—just Pret," Zoe looked self-conscious as she answered.

"Got his machine?"

"Of course."

"Zoe thinks he'll show up to take her to the Lodge to-night," Paula supplied, with prompt malice. "But then she thought he was going to appear and take her to the beach party to-day—so there's another guessing contest."

"Aw, don't be a cat, Polly," said Laura Ashby.

Through the roadside trees there was a glimpse of "Restlands" camp. The Stanford boy they called Jim spoke up as though to make a diversion in favour of peace.

"Nobody there yet—is there?"

"Must be." Joe, his partner on the running-board turned and looked. "One of the upstairs windows is open—see?"

Paula sniffed a little, but condescended to explain,

"Aunt Dale's got a Mrs. Jordan staying there—used to be Police Matron in San Vicente. She's had a hurt foot, and there's been a girl from Las Reudas"—she sent a glance toward the house—"to help about——"

"Oh, look what's here!" Benchy Prentiss chanted. "Look what's coming across the fields from 'Restlands.' That isn't any Mrs. Jordan—a Police Matron—with a hurt foot—that I see before me. That's some girl, believe me! What, ho! She's a-climbing the fence!"

Sidelong, Julian watched a little figure get over the "Restlands" fence, and come along the path through a field, moving, a dot of blue between the fierce orange blaze of California poppies and a singular riot of other wild flowers.

"That's Aunt Dale's latest," Paula said, a bit nervously, "raising wild flowers for seed—to make money, you know, for 'Restlands.'"

"What!" Benchy demanded on the lower register. "Not a girl! A wild flower?"

"Don't be so smart, Bench," Paula said impatiently. "Could you speed up a little, Jule?"

" 'She's a little valley flower,
Growing wilder hour by hour.' "

Benchy squeaked all out of tune. Then with a sudden, disconcerting blurt of bass,

" 'Spoken: Nobody cultivates *me! I'm wild!*"

"Why don't we have this old top down?" Betty Ashby suddenly complained. It would be lots more fun."

"Have a heart, Betsy! Don't make us work," Ball Hannon took her up. "It's only a little ways to the beach now."

"But we might as well get it down," Betty insisted. "Gee, if you boys are so lazy, I'll help. Pull out to one side here, Jule, and stop."

"Oh, no——" began Paula; but Julian's foot was on the brake; the car had already stuttered itself to a halt beside that point in the fence toward which the girl in faded blue gingham and straw hat was heading. There certainly was no intention in the matter. The running-board passengers dropped off before the car stopped, and began yanking the top to stow it. Julian kept his engine running; it panted and choked so that they had to yell to make each other hear above its noise.

"That's the girl." Zoe was rather loud under cover of this uproar. "Speak to her, why don't you, Paula? If you don't, I will."

"What's the use?" Paula got a shoulder up toward the "Restlands" field. "There's no room in the machine."

"Of course there is." Zoe's tone was low now, but energetic. "I call it rotten to go past and leave her standing there, when you know what she's come out here for."

"It's one of the girls from your father's factory," Paula appealed uneasily to Julian. "Aunt Dale sent her down to stay with Mrs. Jordan. She—I—Aunt Dale likes to have us help out with the 'Restlands' girls. I did—sort of invite her—the other day—but we can't take her with us this time."

"Sort of!" Zoe twisted around on Paula's lap and called, "Good morning."

"Good morning."

Julian looked at the girl in the field coming on, as it seemed, reluctantly. She was very fair and shining and delicately col-

oured; too white under the shade of her big hat for an outdoor product, but with wonderful pink in her cheeks. Her lips were like a scarlet thread. Her shy glance dilated a bit, he thought, on all this more than half-naked crowd, the boys wrestling with the top down in the road. Where had he seen before that quick, approbative smile, so brilliant, yet so timid as to be almost piteous? It lit her face all at once when she caught sight of him. There was a little shock of recognition as their glances encountered. He found himself calling, before he knew that he could remember her name,

"Hello, Lynnie."

"Hello," she answered him faintly.

"Oh, *isn't* she pretty!" Zoe was enthusiastic. "We're going to take her down to the beach with us."

"We are not!" Paula's denial was swift.

Julian thought surely the girl must have seen that there was some difficulty about her going, and offered hastily,

"I could come back for her after I take you down."

"And miss your lunch. The idea!" Paula leaned far out of the machine and called, "I'm awfully sorry. There isn't room for you this morning."

"Oh." The girl held on to the top board of the fence and looked at them. The flush on her face deepened agonisingly.

"Jule, tell her you'll come back for her," Zoe whispered.

"I wish you'd keep still," Paula checked her, in a fierce undertone. Then to the girl at the fence, "We'll get you some other time."

"It doesn't matter." The voice was difficult. She kept looking only at Julian with those clear, large-pupilled grey eyes as she said,

"Don't bother about me. Never mind about me—I——"

"Well, so long!"

The boys had got the top stowed, they leaped on, never having known of the little drama of chagrin that had enacted itself by the roadside. Julian started the car.

"I call that a rotten way to treat a person," Zoe said.

Benchy threw up his head to roar,

"Haw! Don't we draw the pretty girl?"

"No. And Paula needn't have asked her if she was going to throw her down before everybody that way."

"I won't ask her next time," said Paula. "I don't mind going over there and turning on the phonograph and having a dance, when Aunt Dale's got ten or a dozen down; but to just take one girl that way—she wouldn't enjoy it—and it spoils all our fun."

Julian coaxed the old car around a sharp turn and over a rough bit of road; close work; the guard-rail on one side, the cliff crowding in on the other. His running-board passengers forgot the girl they'd left behind them in concern for their own bare shanks. But Julian couldn't. Had Paula's asking him—at the last moment, that way—cut the poor little thing out of her chance? Even after the car was through the pass, skirting a paris green square of alfalfa field, getting by the crossroads with its line of open-mouthed R. F. D. boxes: "Antoine Levier," "Manuel Garcia," "Hip Wong," "T. Takaguchi," "Adolf Schultz," and "J. W. Thompson," he went along with a curious split consciousness: the girl back there, this morning, looking after them as they rattled and wheezed past, with such a look; a seven-year-old boy at a gate, further up the road, years ago, staring after disappearing wheels, listening to the tlot, tlot, tlot of horses' hoofs as he got left. You don't forget how a thing like that hurts.

The old machine went fogging along. They came to the corner of the orchard with its gnarled fruit trees set by the padres. They passed the adobe hut, also of the padres' time, where the Pacheco tribe, caretakers of the Mission, lived, and beyond it the squat, corrugated iron garage, put up when the State Highway came through.

They drew opposite the gaping entrance. Julian envied Thatch in there, wearing a pair of borrowed overalls, crawling under the Go-devil. He pulled up, but before he could ask anything about his machine Paula had called,

"Where's Mr. Calkins?"

Thatch waved a greasy hand from under the car.

"Down at the beach. You can see the smoke of his fire."

"Aren't you coming down?" Zoe smiled.

"Going to Bruckner's for my lunch." Thatch rolled over and showed a face with a smudge on it. "Thank you all the same." And his wrench and hammer were busy again.

Paula shrugged. "You're welcome," under her breath; "didn't want you anyhow."

"Well, of course he's sore if you leave Alma Bruckner out. They're engaged, you know, Paul." It was Elinor Hannon who said that.

"I can't have everybody in Siloam Valley at one beach party. If you commence asking all sorts of people——"

"We always do—at ours," said Eileen Hannon.

"More fun that way," added Esther.

Paula merely sniffed.

Julian nursed the snuffling old machine along up the rise to where the Mission stood, warm, yellowish-grey against a diagonal of green hillside, a triangle of blue sea, and the illimitable sky. Thunder of surf on the little crescent beach beyond began to be heard. Through gates that led into the Mission field he went, ran along over the sparse green, mostly summer grass and alfilaria, and cut it neatly in at the edge of a grassy headland that jutted out from the beach. Boys and girls jumped down and dragged out lunch baskets, blankets and robes. Julian took a load and followed down the steep little path to the sands.

Calkins had made his fire and left it; they could see his footsteps leading away around the rocks.

"Off by himself with a book." Paula eyed that trail in the sand. "Neither of you going in! Well, just for that you've got to tend the fire, get ready for lunch, and put the kettle on to make the coffee."

"Suit yourself," Julian said indifferently.

"I'll stay and help you," Eileen Hannon offered.

"So'll I," echoed her twin.

"My goodness!" Paula, who had turned to go down the sands toward the surf, caught herself back. "We'll all help, of course. I didn't mean he'd have to do everything by himself."

Zoe, Elinor and the two Ashby girls had started on with the boys, the whole line swinging down toward the breakers holding hands; their gay, dancing figures silhouetted against the roll of the waves. The Hannon twins made no move to join them; they giggled inanely, and began pulling at the hampers. Paula was plainly at a loss. Those at the water went in, jumped up and down a while, yelling, then some turned to run out.

"Oo—ooh! Look at the young sultan with his harem!" shouted the Stanford boy they had called Jim.

"Gee!—yes—they'd hang around me that way, too," Benchy hallooed, "if I wore them white pants like Jule's got."

The Hannon twins just giggled; but Paula promptly sent Julian back to the Pachecos' for water. He was glad to go. It gave him a chance to stop and speak to Thatch and ask when the Go-devil would be done. Of course he couldn't drive Paula's Cadillac up for that girl they had left, but there was nothing to hinder him from taking his own machine.

He found that the roadster wouldn't be ready for an hour or more. He delayed so long in the pleasant dimness of the garage, with its welcome oily smells and the click of the machinery he loved, that when he got back to the fire Paula was down with the bathers. The Hannon twins still lingered, however, ostensibly warming their hands. They hung around till Benchy Prentiss bawled at them,

"Hey, there—you girls! Come on in here, or I'll haul you in and duck you." At that they scuttled away, giggling to the last.

Relieved, he spread a blanket and lay down. Between his half-closed lids he saw everything glimmering; with the hat pulled halfway over his ears, he heard everything blurred and murmuring: the sands, the sea, red-headed Benchy Prentiss standing braced, his bright, three-cornered face agrin, his crest of football curls lowered a bit, his brown, muscular legs planted, as he yelled a dare for somebody—anybody—everybody—to come and tackle him.

Nothing new here—stale stuff—stale stuff. Let them enjoy each other—he certainly wanted none of them.

Not a soul in that gang down there seemed to have a thought of the girl they had left in the road by "Restlands." Memory of her little face as it had looked when he had started up the old Cadillac hurt him. He was an outsider, too. Willis—yes, that was the name. He hadn't been quite sure when he called her Lynnie—almost automatically. But he remembered now that the Willises lived next door to where Thatch had boarded down in the hollow. It was her brother, Ollie, who, years ago, was killed when the Dip Savage robber cave fell in. She wasn't one of those who had been on the streets much when he first went down there on his pony; he just used to see her delicate little face wondering at him, it seemed, from the window, or on the

sidewalk, going from the tumble-down old house to the public school. Later she was in the tide of factory workers; never one of the girls who were camp followers of that older gang. All he knew of her was that she lived down there, different from those about her, as different as she was from this bunch that had given her such an infernally cruel and unnecessary snubbing this morning.

He got to watching Ball Hannon, who had left the water and was running in crazy circles over the white beach. Three of the girls followed with a long kelp rope and tried to trip him up. Benchy Prentiss roared a warning, and sprinted up beside him. The girls bunched together and came on. Benchy turned, grabbed up tall Paula Pollard and made for the surf with her. There was a wild feminine shriek. The Ashby girls had the kelp, Jim and Joe started for them, but before they could be stopped they had stretched it in Benchy's path. There was a scrimmage; Benchy went sprawling; Julian saw Paula light unhandsomely, and get up a good deal discomposed. She glanced in his direction and started toward him, walking head up.

"Aw, come on back here, Paula—it wasn't my fault," Benchy made what he probably considered a handsome apology. "Come on. Where do you get that dignity stuff?"

"I've had about enough, Benchy Prentiss," Paula said crisply. "You really hurt me."

"You lay off that, now, Prentiss." Ball Hannon turned against his late ally. "If you get Paula to grouching, you'll break up the meeting."

"She'd better cut out the rough stuff herself," blustered Benchy. "Rammed half a ton of sand down my neck; now she wants to pout and play re-fined."

"I've found a dead one!" Zoe Haslett had abandoned the fight down there, caught up an abalone shell and circled the fire to come in on the other side of Julian, where she sank down, panting, throwing sand over his white-flannel-clad legs. "I'm going to bury him with my little spade." Then, changing her tone, looking at him with her head on one side, "What's the matter, Jule? Hadn't you just as soon be dead as alive? You mad at me for burying you?"

"Let him alone." Paula arrived, stiff with injured dignity. "It's time we were all getting dry and having lunch, anyhow."

"Made the coffee, Mac?" yelled Ball Hannon forgivingly.

"Better get the eats ready," Benchy pulled up suddenly and stared with a red eye toward the fire. "When I get as hungry as this I take a bite out of anybody that's handy—and I'm already mad."

Some of them lay down on the warm sand to dry—and sunburn. Others dragged on coats over the wet suits and came to help get out lunch. Julian sat up and watched the coffee. Here came Calkins strolling from the direction of the Mission. They all looked up and yelled at him in chorus,

"Grub pile! Grub pile!"

"Come and get it while it's hot!"

"A little later would have been too late for you, Mr. Calkins!"

Julian was used to Calk's easy way. He watched him coming now to join the wet-haired, bawling crowd on the sands. An instructor at the San Vicente Normal, he knew everybody here and fitted in as perfectly as Julian had been used to see him fit in at receptions and big parties in the Las Reudas home. He came and sat down on a rug and paid no attention to whether the diet regulations were being kept or not. Few of the things which came out of the lunch baskets were listed on Mrs. McCulloch's card. Julian watched the boys lying around on their stomachs, bare shanks waving, bare heels kicking in an outer circle, while the food was shovelled in hastily, more or less uncouthly, with occasional ejaculations of,

"Bully grub!"

"Gosh—this is great!"

He himself ate by the card without a qualm. As he had said to Uncle Ben last night, he didn't care—now; and he certainly didn't care for the crowd. To even the sympathetic looks of the girls he was indifferent.

Would they never be done eating? They were still at it when Julian realised that the hour Thatch had set would be up, and he might have the Go-devil. He glanced around at Paula. Should he say anything to her about driving back for Lynnie Willis—propose to bring her to the beach? He decided against it, exactly as he would have decided against putting anything of the sort up to his mother. He just said,

"I'm going to have a look at my machine."

She was on her feet in an instant, coffee cup in hand. She didn't let him get two steps away, before she began,

"Well, you won't go home in it—with Thatch, will you? I'm afraid you're not having a good time, Jule."

"Oh, yes, I am," briefly.

"Well, listen, I wanted to speak to you about going over to Loma Prieta Forest this evening—to dance, at the Lodge." She made a little pause. He offered no response. She went on hastily, "The floor's splendid. They always have good music on Saturday nights. The management's glad to have us come. They're trying to work up interest in the place."

"I don't care much for——"

"Oh, come on—go," she interrupted him. "Drive us over in my car. I don't feel a bit like driving it myself to-night; and I can't trust Benchy. He's awful."

"Bet your neck you can't trust Benchy!" bawled Prentiss. "Bet your neck Benchy's awful. He means to be—and awfuller."

The others took a hand. Julian was glad; it gave him his chance to get away.

When he reached the garage, Thatch had gone on up to Bruckner's probably, but the Go-devil stood in the middle of the quiet, dusky big shed, and Julian got in, backed it out onto the road and started away at a good speed. Thatch had tuned her up after yesterday's long trip. She ran like silk.

Suddenly the thought struck him, that girl from "Restlands"—she wouldn't be there at the fence now. She'd have gone back to the house, long ago. And because she *was* a girl, he couldn't drive up there and ask for her. He wouldn't be allowed to show her any kindness of any sort. But Paula Pollard had a free hand to invite her—and then turn her down before everybody. He ran slowly past the field of wild blossoms, looking intently over toward the old adobe, driving by instinct rather than sight. As he neared the rutty, neglected lane that led in to the building he hesitated, slowed down and glanced around him. Back in there by the Bruckner place was a shady hollow, with a track like a disused woods road through it. The ground in there was blue with wild iris. All at once he saw a spot of different blue—the gingham dress of a girl walking slowly under the little twisted scrub oaks. He stopped and sounded his horn.

She drew back—almost as though she had been hiding. He jumped out of the machine and went in. They met under the interlaced branches of the little oaks.

"Were you—were you calling me?" she faltered, and he saw she had been crying.

"Yes." The embarrassment of it made him brief. "I've come back for you."

"Oh," she glanced out toward the machine, but still didn't move. "The—the others——" She broke off forlornly and looked up at him with drowned eyes, the pink stains old tears had left on her cheeks showing up very strongly. He choked with pity.

"I left them down at the beach. This is my own bid. Couldn't you come and have a little ride with me—in my machine?"

They began walking toward the road. She swallowed hard, shook her head, and said nothing for a minute; then in a low, uneven voice,

"I guess I wouldn't dare to. Somebody might see us and tell Mrs. Jordan. She thinks I'm gone with Miss Paula Pollard, you know. She gave me my time to go with her. I—I hated to go back and tell. . . . I was just staying out here . . . till . . ."

Her time—the phrase seemed to him intolerable. It was like a servant—a slave.

"What a dirty shame! Why, then—you've had no lunch—nothing to eat."

"I didn't mind that—so much," Lynnie looked over her shoulder. "I saw Alma Bruckner at the milking lot; she asked me to go up to her house to lunch. But Thatcher Dye was going to be there—and——"

"Thatch wouldn't tell on you."

"I know, but—my face—I'm not fit to be seen."

They had got to the road's edge now, near the Go-devil. Lynnie looked at the machine and smiled suddenly, that tremulous April smile of hers that went right to the heart.

"I saw you and Thatcher Dye when you were building that," she said. "You came past our house when it hadn't any top to it, and was all kind of flat like a board."

"The chassis," Julian smiled back at her warmly—the little lost thing—like a young bird fallen from the nest and deserted by the old ones. "I'm going to take you riding in that ma-

chine," he declared; then added suddenly, "and teach you to drive it."

"Thatch took me once in one of your automobiles a little way," with just a delicate flash of the April smile. "You know he boards next door to our house—at the Petty's."

It was liberties like these that had done much toward losing Thatcher his place.

"He's not boarding there now," Julian said. "He's gone over to San Vicente."

"Oh—isn't he working for your father any more?"

"No. He's started a garage of his own. Sounds good to me. I believe I'll go in partnership with him."

He had made her smile outright now. In fact, she laughed a little, faintly. Her eyes were openly flattering as she looked at his white outfit. But all she said was,

"The idea of you running a garage!"

"I'd like it," he insisted, "better than anything I've got hold of yet." Then, with a return to serious urgency, "Aren't you going to get in and let me take you for a little ride? I want to; to make up for this morning. I had to sit there and see you—hear those girls——" He broke off. Some things couldn't be said. They were better represented by others. "Come on. Why not?"

She just looked at him, and her eyes told him without any words that he knew very well why not. It made him half impatient. Did she see any harm in it? He didn't. He was rather pleased with himself and his intentions. They were certainly all to the good. She spoke at last,

"They'd never let me in the world."

He found himself answering, rather to his own surprise,

"Why tell anybody about it, then? Why not slip off? If you'd be somewhere around here at eight o'clock to-night, I'd come past and pick you up. We could have a nice ride. Want to go?"

There could be no doubt about her wanting to go. Right over the traces of tears her little face was so irradiated with a passion of joy and hope and longing that he could hardly bear to look at it. Still, when she spoke it was only to say doubtfully,

"Oh—at night?"

"Yes—at night," he persisted. "That other crowd's going

out to-night, somewhere. Why shouldn't you go—with me? Pret Consadine's coming from Liveoak to take Zoe Haslett in his roadster—why shouldn't I take you in mine?"

Again she stood and looked at him. Again there was no need of words between them. Finally she found speech.

"I—I'll come."

CHAPTER III

THE DARK OF THE MOON

JULIAN had a sense of adventure—and of responsibility, too—when, a little after eight o'clock, he drove the Go-devil, lights out, as quietly as possible up to that corner of the field where Lynnie and he had planned to meet.

Nothing moved. He slowed down, inordinately disappointed. Poor little thing; she had been afraid to come with him, after all; and he'd only wanted to give her a ride in a better machine than Paula's old ark. He would wait a while, anyhow. With a cautious hand he switched on his lamps. Instantly their blazing shaft of illumination found her drawn back between the manzanita bushes, shining-eyed, expectant. He hastily turned them off again; she came and climbed into the machine beside him.

He speeded up; not a word was spoken until they were out of danger of being overhauled, then he found himself welcoming her with,

"I'm glad you made it! I was afraid you weren't going to come."

He could see from the outline that she had dropped her head back and lifted her face to the sky. When she spoke it was to whisper,

"It's the dark of the moon."

The phrase pleased him; but then everything Lynnie had said or done, since first he saw her in the field of wild flowers, had seemed to be just right for him.

"It's the dark of the moon," she repeated. "That made it easy. But—I'd have come some way. I was awfully scared I'd be late—and miss you."

"Going to be warm enough?" He had noted in the brief flash when the lamps were on her that her dress was quite covered by a rough, long coat, grey-plaided, sleazy-looking.

"Oh, yes, I'll be warm enough; this is my winter one." She

snuggled down in the seat beside him with a little shiver that was plainly rapturous excitement.

"You'll need it. Riding in an open machine at night is cool work. Good thing you brought a heavy wrap with you."

"Yes. It's—mother wouldn't let me wear it at all last year—because Rose Daggett got one just like it. I had nothing but my sweater going to the factory, all through the rains. Mother said when I got back she'd have this dyed, or make it over for Bertie, an overcoat or something, and buy me another."

"Why?" flashing his lights on and off to manœuvre a passage where the white guard railings of a culvert narrowed the way.

"She doesn't let me go with Rose, you know," as though no explanation were needed. "Our folks wouldn't buy anything at the Daggett Grocery even, but—sometimes we have to have credit——"

Julian murmured a vague response.

"Isn't it lovely—riding along like this—in the dark?" whispered Lynnie.

"I like it."

"I didn't know you dared drive at night without your lamps lit," the gentle little voice wondered.

"I expect I oughtn't—with you in," said Julian; "might get pinched at it. Just wanted you to see how pretty everything is without them. Now"—and he switched them on with the dimmers—"I'll show you some speed."

The wind that had been going by in a great, soft gush began to whistle through the lap in the windshield, and bring sometimes a bit of gravel that stung against the cheek.

"Too fast for you?"

"Oh, no. It feels like flying."

"Got fined for speeding twice since I've had this roadster," Julian chuckled.

"Oh," in a tone of deep commiseration.

"I didn't mind. Just a fine to pay—and that's the end of it."

"Yes," agreed Lynnie to this talk of the mansion on the hill. It was not till a later time that Julian realised that at the shack below in the gully a fine to pay would have been more like the end of the world; that there, whatever cost money was vital, as though it cost life itself.

They had gone steadily down the valley road, and could get the black of the hills between which the Mission nestled against the vague grey of western sky.

"You won't mind our stopping at the garage for gas, will you? I looked at the gauge before I left, and there's not enough to go as far as we'd like to to-night."

There was a definite pause before Lynnie answered,

"N—no. Not if you think it's all right. I can turn up the collar of my coat—or—or I could wait outside while you went in."

"Oh, we won't have to go in," Julian reassured her. "They'll have the gas out in front. It's just a boy there—a Mex. He won't notice you. It wouldn't make any difference if he did. I'll give him an extra quarter when I pay for the gas."

Julian made the rise on a rounding turn and rolled to a stop before the garage. José Pacheco, a dark-faced young fellow, came out yawning. He nodded to them inclusively. Julian felt sure he couldn't recognise Lynnie—funny little thing to care anyhow what people like the Pachecos knew about her! It made him smile to see how she had sunk down in the collar of her coat, and how she sat silent, averted, while the gasoline was pumped in and paid for. Just for luck he gave the boy an extra half dollar instead of a quarter. They got the highway at the Mission; smooth as a floor under the wheels; from that on, they seemed to be flowing along the dusky road.

With the same ease flowed the stream of talk—just thinking aloud. He had never before wanted to be spoken to when he was at the wheel; he had been grumpy and silent coming down to Siloam with Calkins, and rather worse with the crowd in the big machine this morning; but he answered all this girl's timid little half questions, he went ahead with explanations and statement of his own. Almost before he knew it, he was telling her of his final disaster—the beer in the old barn up the gulch, with the Daggett gang, maintaining,

" 'Twasn't that I cared particularly about getting lit up; I didn't even know that I was drunk."

"They say you never do—when you are," Lynnie put in mildly. It made him laugh.

"I remember strewing the fellows all around and walking over some of them. I said I was going home and play at the reception. They got round me and tried to make me stay where

I was—those I'd walked on and all—but I wouldn't. Finally the whole gang went with me to the machine—— I was perfectly pleased about it. I felt good; I wanted them to come. I told 'em I'd give 'em Chicken *à la King* when we got home. I drove all right, only I speeded some!"

"That awful crowd—Zen Daggett, and Dip Savage! What did your father say?"

"Father? He never knew anything about it. He doesn't come to the receptions mother gives."

"Doesn't he?"

"No. Calkins got hold of me."

"Mr. Calkins. He's nice, isn't he?" Lynnie's words seemed merely to fill in a pause.

"Calk's all right," Julian agreed. "I wasn't so far out when I told him he was the best friend I ever had. The waiters were serving buffet supper. I'd got right into the middle of the dining-room—in front of the sideboard—after the Chicken *à la King* for the boys, before I noticed that they'd run as soon as they'd ditched me at the door. There were a lot of folks in the parlours I knew. I wanted to go in there. I felt friendly. I didn't think they would see anything wrong about me—only of course I wasn't dressed for an evening reception. Then I noticed that I must have fallen down some, getting to the house, for I had dirt all over my knees. It made me laugh."

A little inarticulate sound of comprehension from Lynnie.

"But Calkins got hold of my arm. He sort of patted my shoulder and told me to come along up to my room, he had something to talk to me about up there—just between us two. I can hear him now, saying over and over, 'All right, McCulloch. You're all right.' Regular brick, he was. You can go through that side entry, past the music-room and upstairs, without anybody in the parlours seeing you. He'd have got me away and never told on me, if mother hadn't come along. The minute I got sight of her, in her evening clothes—scared to death—and she mixed in, I pulled away from him. She began calling me down, and Calkins said, 'Not now, Mrs. McCulloch. Don't talk to him now.' She wouldn't quit. She shut the door behind her, and came up close, and told me what a disgrace I was——"

"That's the way my mother goes on sometimes," said Lynnie,

when he checked abruptly. "She'd rather see one of us in our coffin than disgraced."

"Huh, I didn't mind about being a disgrace. Might be rather interesting; but she said she wouldn't take me with her East and I couldn't go to Alaska; I'd got to come up here and stay all summer. The minute she let up, Calkins handled me easy. Next thing I knew I was walking right upstairs with him, telling him he was the best friend I ever had. He got me to undress and go to bed—and that's the last I knew till—gee, how my head felt in the morning—and my tongue—and the back of my mouth!"

Again Lynnie's little wordless sound of sympathy.

"I sure was one sick kid! I'd been too woozy the night before to get much sense out of what she said about Alaska; it hit me where I live when I found next morning what it really meant; and that she was sticking to it. But I kept on telling her I didn't care—and that made her worse. She'd have been talking till now, I guess, but Calkins came and asked if we couldn't go for a hike instead of lessons. Awfully decent of Calk; poor old chap can't hike for sour apples—with that game leg of his. And he does hate it. We walked away up on the hill, north of your house, you know, Lynnie, where the eucalyptus planting is, and he gave me good advice. No, I'm not joking—it *was* good advice. Explained what it does to you to get drunk. In the long run, I mean; he didn't need to explain what it does in the short run; my head was just killing me. Gives you bum tissues—and liver—and faculties. Then—what do you think, Lynnie?—he told me about being drunk once himself, when he was younger than I—a lot younger—not more than sixteen! Old Calk—can you beat it!"

Lynnie's laugh echoed his softly. After a little silence Julian said,

"Ben Dye told me last night that my Uncle Tom Julian drank sometimes—but he could always carry his liquor. That's what a man's got to do. It's what I didn't do."

"Your Uncle Tom—the one you're named for?"

He nodded.

"It made a splendid name for you—Julian. My people are from Lynn, Massachusetts. They named me for the town."

"It's a nice one, too," Julian agreed, with warmth. "And I like Lynnie."

"Father's proud of our surname," Lynnie hastened along the cheerful little conversational by-path she had opened up. "Proud of being related, you know, to the poet—Nathaniel P. Willis. We have the book—'Willis's Poems.' Father gave it to mother when they were first married."

Julian found himself talking away like smoke, even while making speed on the open stretches; still talking he was as they slowed down for sharp turns and steep grades. He kept on—just kept right on—never got out of something to say. Not because he was afraid of silences, either. It seemed to him that he would not have been embarrassed to go for miles in the dark, shoulder to shoulder with Lynnie Willis, and not a word said. There would still have been a sense of companionship in that.

Suddenly a tall gateway loomed by the roadside; the sign above it read, "LOMA PRIETA FOREST." A toll-keeper's lodge was being built inside, but the gate leaned against the fence ready for its hinges. As Julian slowed up to turn the car in, a small white roadster flashed past them without warning, sheering so close that it seemed as though they must collide, darting on ahead into the enclosure.

"Take a mud-guard, won't you?" Julian looked after the vanishing tail light. "I believe that was Pretty Consadine. That's about the way he drives."

They rolled through the opening and onto the broad, smooth way within.

"It was the girl that sat in Miss Paula Pollard's lap, in the machine this morning," Lynnie said.

"Zoe Haslett. It was Pret, then."

They swung north-westward around curve after curve of the broad drive, bordered by tall black pines; a salt air blew in their faces, and they began to hear the sound of the sea.

"I wanted to drive past the dunes," he said. Then, sniffing as the heavy, fulsome odour of beach apple came to them in the dark, "Ugh, what a queer, nasty-sweet smell that stuff's got! What is it it's like?"

"I don't know. It's kind of sickly."

"I remember now—laudanum."

"Is it? I've never smelled laudanum."

"I have. In an old boiler shed down at the factory, there was a locked cupboard. I was feeling round once and got hold of some stuff that was chucked away in there. Zen Daggett said it was laudanum, and they're not allowed to put it in The Remedy any more. It smelled just like this. I put some in a pocket flask."

"What would you want of it?" Lynnie wondered. "Laudanum'd kill you, wouldn't it?"

"Yep. Oh, I just like to have it. I don't know why."

"How much would it take to kill you, do you suppose?"

"A teaspoonful—or a tablespoonful—maybe."

"Well—you—you didn't take any?"

"No—sure not."

"What did you do with it?"

"Left the bottle in my bureau, under my ties."

Julian picked up a bit of bad trail that ran straight down across the dunes to the beach, and turned the Go-devil's nose into it, saying only,

"Let's go get some of that stuff; it's in bloom."

Far behind them sounded a long, chittering note.

"Good thing we left the main road;" Julian stopped in the little track and cut off his lights. "That must be Paula Pollard and her crowd—driving over to the Forest Lodge to dance."

"What makes you think it's them?"

"Don't you recognise the Cadillac's horn? She asked me to go with them to-night. I forgot all about it."

"You—forgot?"

Secure in the dark, they sat twisted around staring back and up while the big car with its noise and lights travelled along above them. That was Paula at the wheel. She came to the bad going where their steep little road opened out of the drive, skidded, in the loose sand, slewed her machine around till a sudden glare, that just missed the Go-devil and its occupants, illuminated all the scattered lupine bushes near, lit up the bed of beach apple, and even threw a swordlike gleam along a line of noisy breakers out beyond. Julian felt Lynnie tremble and cower. She came round against him, hiding her face, even in the dark. But those in the Cadillac had plenty to occupy their attention.

"For cat's sake, Paula!" they heard Benchy Prentiss yell. "You've killed your engine—again!" Then Paula's voice:

"I can't help it. This sand's a foot deep. I tell you to *keep out of my way!*"

Some one got down and cranked. With a snort the motor took hold. The big car stood there shaking, glaring, roaring. The two in the dark crouched, waiting while,

"Let me out!"

"Oh—get off of me!"

"That's my foot!" came the chorus of cries. Then the gears clashed into reverse, the crazy old trap was backed, swung around, and went skidding and groaning forward with its lights and outcry. They had not been noticed. After the Cadillac was gone the little machine sat in the dark, with the mysterious grey-white of the sand on all sides, the strange, lonely, eternal noise of the sea out there, own brother to dead silence. Once Julian reached to start the Go-devil, then sat back thinking. Lynnie watched him. Finally she spoke, with an odd, choked utterance that instantly attracted Julian's notice.

"What will you do about it now? Is the Lodge—far from here?"

"What?"

"I—I hate to be in your way——"

"To—be in my—— Why, look here, Lynnie, I wasn't going with them, anyhow. I don't care about those people. I asked you to drive to-night because I wanted to make up to you for this morning. Yes—and I'll take you up to the Lodge—if you'll go—serve them right."

"To the Lodge!" Her tone asked if he were only joking. "Of course I couldn't. I wasn't invited."

"You don't have to be invited to the Lodge. It's public—a public restaurant—anybody can go that wants to."

"Oh, but Miss Paula would be awfully mad. She'd go right to Mrs. Jordan about it."

"Paula'd be mad; but I don't believe she'd do that."

"You don't know. Everybody thinks it's right to go and tell the matron of a place like 'Restlands' if one of the girls—is breaking the rules. You don't know."

"I suppose I don't."

"Then, anyhow, I'm not dressed fit."

"Why, you look nice. What's the matter with the way you're dressed?"

"Well, I *have* got on my white middy suit, under this coat," Lynnie's little hesitating voice meant even to Julian's ignorance that the white middy suit was also her best, and that she longed desperately to go to the Lodge with him. "But these old shoes," she was finishing half-heartedly, when he broke in on her,

"Then we won't go inside." His foot touched the starter. The Go-devil began climbing up the deep sand of the road like some powerful iron spider. "There are tables on the porches. We can slip into a dark corner out there and have some—chicken *à la King!*" He laughed, but she still demurred.

"I—I really don't believe I dare. Somebody might see us."

"They won't. Anyhow, we'll go up and look in. If you're afraid to stay, we'll come right back."

Lynnie's silence was more eloquent of desire than anything she could have said. Julian accepted it as consent, and went ahead, without another word. A few moments later, when they swung up the green-banked drive to the Lodge, and looked around the semi-circle of waiting machines, sure enough there stood Paula's Cadillac, and further over Pretty Consadine's little white racer. Julian quickly manœuvred the Go-devil into place in front of the log-and-boulder building, helped Lynnie out, and they skirted the big, lighted area and came up at the end of the porch where the blaze of the electric globes was modified a little by vines.

Down by the main doorway Ball Hannon was talking to the steward. They waited until he went in, then crossed swiftly to the further end, passing the front door, the big windows, through which they could see Paula's party just coming out of the dressing-rooms, wraps off, hair smoothed, noses powdered anew, joining the dancers who were moving about in a Boston. Julian kept Lynnie on the outside—if he himself were seen and recognised it wouldn't count so much. She leaned around him as they went, for one or two fearful, delicious glances. He noted the look of her eyes.

"There's the boy that was in the white automobile," she whispered. "Dancing with Miss Haslett. The one you called 'Pretty.' He is pretty."

Julian chuckled. Pretty Consadine came about to his elbow.

His blue eyes and curly light hair, with a fair complexion, got him his nickname.

"Looks like I used to when I was about nine," he said derisively.

"Oh, no!"

"Wasn't I as good-looking as that?" he demanded.

"Of course you were," she blushed. "But—but your eyes were black."

He looked at her eyes, and found it hard to say what colour they seemed. He knew them to be grey, but now the pupils were so large, they glowed so, that they might have been blacker than his own. He found a little table in an angle of the wall.

"Let's take this one," he suggested.

An electric globe hung just above it. Lynnie hesitated. Julian saw that she was uneasy, reached up and unceremoniously turned off the light.

"Thank you," she breathed, and sank into her chair and the shadow, laughing a little tremulously, clutching the edge of the table, adding, "We mustn't stay very long—must we?"

A waiter came out to them, plainly frightening her again; but she straightened up, as Julian took the menu card from the man and asked her,

"What shall we have?"

"Oh—anything."

"I guess we'd better not stop for our—for anything that would have to be cooked special—to-night?"

"No, no, indeed."

"Next time we come, I'll telephone ahead and have them get us up a nice little dinner." Julian was trying to read the menu card.

"Something the matter with the lamp, sir?" The waiter questioned doubtfully.

"No. I turned it off." Julian took his flash from his pocket and threw a little circle of illumination on the card he pushed across to Lynnie. "Look at that and see if there's anything on it you'd like."

"Ice cream." The childish voice was very low, with a tincture of awe in it.

"Would you care for that? Isn't it too cold? Which kind?"

But it seemed that Lynnie's desires went no further than the generic article. The waiter finally put in a suggestion.

"We have pistachio and mocha this evening. Our mocha's very good."

"Mocha, then. And some good cake—plenty of it."

"Light hurt your eyes, sir?"

The waiter's inquiry before he turned to go was friendly, and a little jocose. Julian glanced up at him.

"We're dodging the crowd that came in just before us," he said carelessly, nodding toward the door. Instantly the man looked back to the semi-circle of waiting automobiles, then leaned down to murmur:

"Your machine's right in the light, sir. If one of them stepped out to theirs for anything—you'd be gone."

"That's so."

"Shall I have one of the chauffeurs move it for you, sir? You won't have to cross the porch."

Julian nodded. The coin he slipped into the convenient palm was of a size to make its owner linger a moment and suggest,

"I think the other party's going to have the table just inside your window, here, but that needn't trouble you—as long as you keep your light off."

He went then, and Lynnie leaned far back in the shadows as they sat and waited for their ice cream. The music came out to them.

"A One-Step," she whispered, as her small, shabby foot tapped time to it.

"Do you like to dance?"

"Just—love it." The words had a little break in them, almost like a sob of rapture; her face when she bent incautiously forward as the waiter approached with their tray, looked to the boy across from her lit, illumined, quite as though there were a flame behind the glow of her cheeks and the soft shining of her eyes.

"Around just back of the South corner—faced out—ready to start," said the man, smiling, and immediately retired.

They had half finished their cake and cream when there came a stir and fluttering inside the window—Paula and her crowd getting seated.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven—eight," cackled Benchy Prentiss. "Who's the vacant chair for, Polly?"

"Zoe and I've got a table to ourselves." Pretty Consadine's voice came from a little further over; they could hear it all as plainly as though they had been sitting in there with the party. There was a sound of scraping chairs as the waiter evidently removed two from the larger table.

"Still got a vacancy, Polly," Benchy held to it. "We shall meet but we shall miss him."

"I wish you'd cut that out, Benchy," Paula spoke loud in her irritation. "It's not a bit smart."

"What's the matter with the crowd to-night, anyhow?" that was Eileen Hannon's wail. "We're out to have a good time—and you boys go and spoil the whole thing joshing Paula—just because she said Jule McCulloch would come with us—and he didn't."

"Who cares, anyhow, about Jule McCulloch?" The thin little voice sounded like Esther.

"Oh, Julian would have come to-night if he'd felt able." Paula's tone was full of "the dignity stuff."

"Well, if he was here now I don't see that it would do the rest of us any particular good." That was Laura Ashby. "Polly'd be copping him out for herself all the time—or trying to—if she had to break up the party to do it."

"Well, this is a nice crowd," Paula began, and some one pleaded,

"Aw, don't act like a bunch of roughnecks!" But Zoe Haslett called across from her table, maliciously,

"What did he say when you 'phoned him, Paula?"

"He—wasn't there." The surprise had plainly demoralised Paula.

"Gone somewheres else, do you mean?" They heard Zoe following it up.

Lynnie leaned forward and clapped her hands soundlessly, laughing in dumb show. Her delicate little face sparkled with joyous mischief.

"Oh, for goodness' sake—be still!" Paula burst out furiously. And some one that sounded like Ball Hannon seconded the motion with,

"I've had a-plenty of it—for one. Here comes the waiter.

Oh—ow—*Zowie!*" There was a scuffling inside the window, a splash, and then a shriek from Esther.

"All over my sleeve! Ugh! We certainly have the worst luck to-night! I believe we're hoodoed." After that a babel of,

"Sop it up with a napkin."

"It'll all come out in the wash, Essie."

"I don't care so much for the old thing—it's the discomfort of it."

It was as good as a play to hear them. Squabble, squabble, just as it had been at the beach party to-day. And here sat the girl Paula turned down so coolly, having a lot better time than any of them. He had finished his ice cream, Lynnie was taking the last spoonful of hers. An empty cake plate lay between the two glasses.

"Shall I order more?" She shook her head and murmured,

"We ought to be going."

As they got silently up, Julian glanced through the window.

"Come and look at them," he whispered. "It's rather fun. They can't see you if you keep out of the light."

Lynnie slipped over beside him. They had a good view of both tables.

"Miss Haslett and the young man you called 'Pretty' look sort of different from the others."

Julian chuckled.

"That's what makes all the row," he explained. "Pret's out of their class. He belongs to the San Francisco smart set. Zoe, too, for that matter. It keeps Paula and the others sore all the time."

"They have so much more money, do you mean?" Lynnie asked, with interest.

"A lot more. Pret's got about three million of his own. His father's dead. He bosses his mother. Zoe's not got so much, but either of them could buy out the whole bunch of small-town bounders and never notice it. That's what's eating Paula. Want to go now?"

"Yes."

They found the machine at the south end of the Lodge beyond the lights, and got in. A moment they sat there in the good little car, looking back at the lighted building with its clatter and its music.

"Oh, that was lovely!" sighed Lynnie. "And I'm sure no one saw us."

"I'll bring you again—when that crowd isn't here," Julian said, as he started the motor.

They passed the place where the sickly-sweet smell of the beach apple came out to them, swung round turns and up hills at speed. They shot through the gate. The Julian McCulloch of yesterday—if he had ever got so far—would certainly have turned homeward now; but to-night the Go-devil headed northward. Julian heard Lynnie catch her breath; but she said nothing. On and on they went, skimming down a long hill, hearing the thunder of the surf again as they neared the bay.

"She's making forty-five miles," Julian said above the roar of their speed. "We're on the Cebolla road—want to go there?"

"To-night?"

"I guess we could make it—and back. What time do you have to get up in the morning?"

"Soon as it's light—whenever that is."

"Whew!" Julian whistled and slowed down. "I oughtn't to keep you out like this, when you have to be up so early."

"Oh, I'm used to it." Lynnie's tone was neither plaintive nor deprecating. "At home mommie always has us up before day."

Julian was lingering along, looking for a good place to turn.

"Guess what time it is," he said.

"I couldn't—I haven't any idea."

"After midnight."

"Is it?"

"I'll take you straight back home—and make time. I ought to have asked you about it before. You'll never want to go with me again."

"Oh, yes, I will. I don't mind it's being late."

"Well, then, we'll have some good rides," said Julian quickly. He made a back turn, and drove hard. About twenty minutes later they flew past the gate of the forest, getting its signboard in a flash. It seemed no time after that till they were passing the Mission and the garage, swinging into the valley road. It was one o'clock as they neared "Restlands."

"Suppose I shut off the lights and try this woods road through the brush?" Julian spoke low to his passenger. "I could get right up close to the house that way."

"O—but don't!" Lynnie whispered, all in a flutter. "I'd rather you wouldn't. You'd better stop here." They came to a halt. "See," she said, as she moved to get out, "that's my window, upstairs there where the curtain's blowing out."

The window she pointed to was above a flat-roofed shed. Julian looked at it and laughed.

"That's an easy one to get down from."

"Yes, it'd be easy. I was going to come out that way tonight, but didn't have to. I found a chance to slip out of the kitchen door. I'm going to climb in there, though."

"Now? I'd better help you."

"No."

"Going to go with me again?"

"Oh—yes. I've had a splendid time. I never did ride in an automobile so long before."

"Well, you're going to—longer than that, next time. Good-night."

"Good-night."

She was gone. Julian watched till a little dark shape obscured the fluttering white curtain; something seemed to pick it up and gave it to him. Then he wheeled back into the road and started for the McCulloch ranch.

CHAPTER IV

OUTSIDE

NEXT morning Julian slept late and soundly in his tent. It was after eleven o'clock when at last he opened his eyes, and lay looking about him for a time in a pleasant drowse; the canvas walls were luminous, the air inside here soft and balmy with sun. He felt great. The fifty feet of garden hose lying out in the open would give him a dandy warmed shower. He jumped up, shucked off his pajamas and got into his swimming trunks, then stuck his head through the tent curtains for a survey.

Nobody about. It was a radiant morning. He didn't remember when he had seen everything look so fine. The house yonder with its rosebush covering the whole side, spreading a roof of blossoms over the arbour where Uncle Ben had built a rough table and served the meals—for the first time he liked the house. He squinted at it through narrowed lids. It was a fat, foolish old brown slave woman, a pink Merry Widow hat pulled on sidewise, smirking back at you and trying to please.

The next minute he was out, two fingers in his mouth, signalling shrilly for Estancio. Estan appeared on the instant; he had plainly been waiting around to hose Julian off—and get his tip. The sun-warmed water was like a great caress. Wow! but the cold that came after it stung and braced! Whistling softly, taking his time, he dried himself off in the tent and proceeded to dress. Twice while he was getting into his clothes in this leisurely fashion Uncle Ben hallooed to him; and when he finally walked over to the arbour he found that the meal which waited there was his breakfast, and Dye's lunch.

"Thatch and Calkins gone?" he asked.

"Yep. Waddye think?" pouring coffee. "Trains run weekdays and Sundays, whether Jule McCulloch sleeps till noon or not." Julian's knife and fork stopped suddenly. Sunday morning!

"Uncle Ben," he said, "d'you know I intended to get down to the Mission for services."

"Huh?" the old man blinked at him humorously. "Sounds serious. Consarned about your soul?"

Julian shook his head.

"You was pounding your ear a mile a minute when the folks commenced to go by here for the Mission this mornin'," Dye said. "There's but one thing on earth that could get a boy of your age up for early mass—an' she ain't a Catholic."

"She——"

Julian pulled up short. Of course he wouldn't have minded, for himself, what he said, but that poor little thing, living in a kind of working-girls' home, it was different with her.

"No harm done." Dye was cheerful. "Knowed it was a she." He stopped tantalisingly. Julian was conscious of a hot face and an inquiring eye, when he would very much have preferred to look cool and noncommittal. Not that he was ashamed of the girl. His mother was strong on class; Paula Pollard was always talking about "our set." For himself, he didn't care a whoop. People were people; and Lynnie Willis had a lot more sense and was a lot more interesting than any of Paula's crowd.

"What do you mean?" he asked at last.

"Mean? Say—ain't you fierce! Must be hard hit. Well, lemme give you a tip, Jule: you won't have much chasin' to do. Set still an' wait. She'll come after you." Again Julian found nothing to say but the repeated,

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, I'm not criticisin' anybody," old Ben had the air of wanting to let him down easy. "I find it's all the style these days for the girls to go after the boys. Used to be t'other way about when I done my courtin'."

"Are you speaking of anybody in particular—or just in a general way?" Julian finally put it. He felt he must know.

"Particular. Needn't bother to get up for early mass. She's started telephonin' here for you."

"And you didn't wake me?"

She had telephoned to him—already—this morning? He could hardly believe it. Yet though Uncle Ben sat and laughed about it teasingly, he seemed to be telling the truth.

"You tie your eyebrows in a hard knot when you're mad,

don't you, Jule?" he grinned. "She never asked me to wake you up nor nothin' like that. I was goin' to tell you pretty soon. It's an invitation—for this afternoon."

He paused so long that Julian had time to think. It certainly could not be Lynnie.

"Where——?" he was beginning, when old Ben broke in on him,

"Over at their ranch. About half the valley makes it headquarters when she's there."

"Look here, Uncle Ben, who telephoned to me?" Julian demanded.

"No use lettin' on you don't know."

"I suppose it was Paula Pollard."

"O. K., son. Your supposer's workin' right up to specifications. That's who. Better dress up and go over. Be back here at six an' I'll give you some supper—or dinner—as you say. Go along."

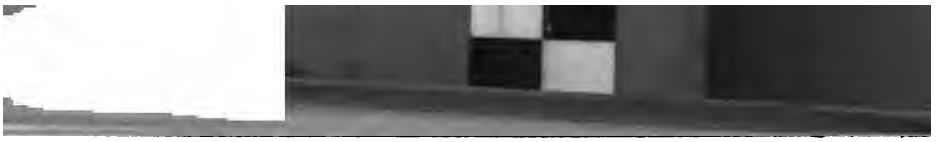
"I believe I will." Julian was not aware of having spoken aloud till old Ben, chuckling, called after him,

"I believe you will, too. An' wear some o' them white clothes. Wear 'em, Jule. They're the neatest things you've got."

What a lot of bother he'd let himself in for by not making sure, before he left Lynnie, when and how he could see her again. This going to the Pollard ranch—he'd meant to keep free from the bunch here in Siloam this summer. Even now he decided that he might as well run down past "Restlands" first, and did so with no success. His Sunday afternoon at Paula's bored him, as he had known it would. When he left he trailed down past "Restlands" again, and again failed to see her anywhere about.

Well, he had been stupid not to make a definite arrangement with her. He spent Sunday evening at a stereopticon lecture on the Holy Land given in the schoolhouse. Some of the girls from "Restlands" were there, but Lynnie was not among them. When the thing was over it was still a dead mystery to him how it was he had been placed between the Hannon twins and had to talk polite stuff to Mrs. Hannon.

It seemed they were all for a basketball game on an indoor court over at Liveoak, Monday evening. He somehow got an



impression that about everybody from Siloam would be there. So he went.

No one over from Siloam but the usual bunch. Paula, the Hannons, the Ashbys and Bench Prentiss, they all kept crabbing because Zoe Haslett and Bench's two guests were up at the big hotel at a better affair. Julian had to sit with them down there on the ground in front and continually dodge the ball. He didn't try to be agreeable. Toward the end of the game, when it was almost time to go, Paula, who had sulked at him rather specially all evening, leaned over and said with sudden civility,

"Aunt Dale's raised enough money to send down the first bunch of girls to 'Restlands.'"

"Yes?"

"I promised to go over and help out with a kind of little party for them." She raised her eyebrows and looked at him. "To-morrow night. I know boys hate that sort of thing. Jim and Joe are pretending to have a date at San Pablo. If I thought you'd go with us——"

"Certainly—I'll be glad to help."

"Well, thank you! It's a relief to have you take it that way." Paula seemed quite surprised at her own success. "Your mother gave them a piano this year, you know, and we've got nobody to play it. I'm glad you don't mind going." She didn't ask him to take her and Zoe over, though for a minute he was afraid she might.

Driving home that night, crossing in on the Livesak road, alone in his car, he turned down past "Restlands." All shut up and dark. Well—it was after eleven o'clock. He went on down until he could see the Mission and hear the surf. He had thought to go out on the Highway a bit, but he only made the loop and swung back into the valley road. Coming up to "Restlands" again, he drove very slowly, looking across to the old adobe. There was Lynnie's window. He might go over and whistle softly under it and just tell her he was going to be there for the party. What a bone-headed, crabbing, dissatisfied crowd over there at the ball game to-night! In the dark he reached out and laid his hand on the seat where Lynnie had sat beside him. Funny about girls. Why should it make such a difference to have her there—or not there? Most of the time she hadn't

been saying anything in particular. Queer how much he wanted to see her again.

Next evening after dinner, restless and impatient, Julian drove the Go-devil up on Old Bitter. Just to kill the time, he got out and sat a while looking down, seeing everything in the valley spread out before him, smiling a bit patronisingly as he remembered the Julian McCulloch who had lain there last Friday evening. This was a peach of a lookout. He'd bring Lynnie up here some time. Nobody else in Siloam he gave a hang for; but he was willing to share his lookout with her. She had sand, too; you'd never hear a whimper out of her about being afraid. Arms under head, he relaxed himself to a vague vision of the evening ahead of him: roomful of girls in party dress, music, (well, that would be the phonograph) and himself dancing with Lynnie. He'd bet she was a good dancer. . . .

When next he looked to the valley, there was Paula's machine out in the side yard at the Pollard ranch, tiny figures coming from the house and swarming into it. The old 'bus lumbered through the gate and started along the road to "Restlands." He hadn't thought it was as late as that! He got into the Go-devil and hardly knew how he made the coast down the mountainside. At that the old Cadillac had beaten him to it, for when he turned in at the lane the "Restlands" building was all lit up and the big car stood empty in its side yard.

It surprised him a little to find his heart beating so hard as he went up the steps. He could see Paula and Zoe Haslett inside, with Elinor Hannon. Quite a lot of others, too; but they all made a blur to his eye; so he knew Lynnie was not among them. A big, square-looking woman—Mrs. Jordan—opened the door to him, and led the way into the living-room. Zoe and Paula and the Hannons welcomed him loudly. Still no Lynnie. A row of girls sat along the side of the room as though they had been glued to their chairs; they must be the ones Miss Pollard had sent down.

"I'm so glad you did come, Jule," Paula recalled him to himself. "We want to dance, and if you hadn't come we'd have had to use the phonograph. If you don't mind playing for us? —one or two dances?"

"Oh, certainly." He went to the piano and sat there, eyes in the back of his head, to watch for Lynnie's coming, everything

that didn't concern her sounding in a sort of jumble to his ears, whatever seemed as though it might lead to her ringing out preternaturally clear. All the time he was laughing to himself over the situation. Wouldn't they stare if they knew what had brought him here to-night—whom it was that he was waiting, listening, looking for!

A one-step. His fingers flew over the keys mechanically. Some of the girls had already begun to dance; others were rolling up rugs and shaving a candle for the floor. He had the haziest idea of who was speaking or what was said, till all at once Zoe Haslett's voice sounded out clearly,

"Where's that pretty little girl we saw the day we went down to the beach?"

A thrill went through Julian. Good thing his back was to the room, the thought timed itself to the one-step. It was Paula who answered coldly,

"Oh—Lynnie Willis. Why, I supposed she was here."

"Where is she, Mrs. Jordan?" Zoe persisted. Julian liked her for it!

"In the kitchen. We've had an awful lot of work to-day, Miss Haslett. Lynn's tired. She said she didn't want to clean up and come in."

Julian began to be angry. This was not what he had imagined an hour ago up on Old Bitter—the party, the music—himself dancing with Lynnie! Was he going to miss her—right here in the house? Why was she out in a dirty old dress, working, while the others were getting ready for a dance? Was she trying to duck the thing because Paula got it up? Of course she was, after the way Paula had treated her. And she didn't know he was here. Then a heavy peasant-looking girl at the end of the row earned his gratitude by volunteering,

"I'll go call her oncet, Mis' Jordan—shall I?"

"Yes. Tell her the young ladies want her to come in. She must be done her dishes."

Julian went on playing. The girl clumped across and into the kitchen. In a few moments the door opened again. From the side of his eye he got a glimpse of the little thing standing timidly in it, her hands and arms rolled in her apron.

He'd never thought of anything like this. She just stood there, and it seemed that out of her still little figure there came

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a power that enveloped him, swamped him. Strange how he could see her so well, hardly turning his head. A kitchen drudge —that's what they made her. Why, she spoiled the looks of every one else in the room! That wonderful colour was changing in her cheek, her lip was a little bitten. She laughed faintly and looked all around the room. "Please excuse me to-night," she said. Then all at once her delicate face flushed rosily. Aha! She hadn't known he was here when she refused to come in; and now she was sorry. Nobody urged her. He couldn't. She finally turned and went very slowly. Rage burned in Julian.

"Give us another one-step, Jule," Zoe called. He began again to play. Heavens—he didn't know what it was he was playing! Paula and Zoe each asked one of the "Restlands" girls to dance. They kept stopping him because he played too fast. Halfway through, Benchy came in. Julian had the most confused consciousness of the crowd there in the room dancing, talking; would Lynnie come back, after all, now she knew he was here?

Suddenly he was aware of Paula leaning around the end of the piano, smiling into his face, whispering,

"It was awfully mean of me to make you come here to-night. Don't look so perfectly miserable. I'll have them wind the phonograph, and then you can dance."

"Thank you. I am tired—of playing." He got to his feet, and while she stood there waiting for him to ask her to dance, muttered something about, "Excuse me—back in a minute," and bolted out. Uncivil? Well, he didn't care. They'd fixed it so that the only one in Siloam Valley he'd give a whoop to dance with was shut out.

He let the door slap to behind him, skirted the house, and glanced up at the window over the flat shed roof. There was a dim light, and the curtain swayed out and in. He picked up a very small pebble and threw it. Almost instantly the light went out, and Lynnie's voice said softly above there, with a little wavering note in it,

"Who is that?"

"Me. Come down a minute."

The answer was a momentary obscuring of the white curtain, the brushing sound of some one moving over the shed roof; then Lynnie dropped down beside him, a little breathless.

Just to make sure she was there he put out a hand, touched her—and forgot all about asking her to come in and dance. What he did was to laugh unsteadily, "You've got me studying the almanac."

"What?"

"The dark of the moon. I wanted to ask you for another ride. Where have you been keeping yourself? I couldn't get sight of you."

She laughed, too, at that, very low, in the dark.

"Right here. I've hardly been off the place—we were so busy in the house. We had to get all cleaned up for the girls. Every bit of the bedding that was left here had to be washed. We washed a carpet, too."

"A carpet! I didn't know they did such things," Julian said helplessly. "Or, anyhow, I thought they had a man for it. Are you too tired to walk a little way? We'll go in the machine, if you are."

"The machine? Oh, I'd be afraid. Somebody's hear us."

"No, no—too much noise in there."

They stood a moment, listening to the phonograph, the sound of shuffling feet, and raised voices.

"Well," doubtfully, "we might just go over and sit in the car, but don't let's start it up."

As they climbed into the roadster, "I don't know how many times I've trailed past here in this machine," he said. "Twice Sunday—and I never got a glimpse of you."

"I saw you," said Lynnie, settling herself beside him.

"Where were you?"

"On the hill back of the house, between here and Bruckner's —getting wild flowers."

"You were? Why didn't you Hoo-hoo? And there I went down to the schoolhouse looking for you, and got let in for a lecture on—I don't know what the deuce it was on."

"Looking—for *me?*"

"Sure, you. Who else? I wanted to see when you'd go riding with me again. Don't you want to go?"

"Oh—yes."

"Well, then, the next time you see me passing you'll call to me?"

"Yes—if there isn't anybody with you."

"There wasn't anybody with me Sunday."

"No, but there were some folks passing at the same time—Tony De Vega and his mother and the two little children. Did you know you almost ran into them?"

"Yes. No—I didn't know that was his name. A Portuguese going along the road wouldn't keep you from calling to me, would it?"

"Why—no—I didn't mind Tony so very much," she hesitated. "I just never thought of calling to you—from so far. I did run down the hill, closer. I thought maybe you might come back. But you didn't. That must have been when you were on your way home to supper."

It was pleasant out here in the half-dark of the side yard. There were no shades at the windows. light through the cheesecloth curtains showed up the old Cadillac and left them in welcome shadow. Yammering of the phonograph, squeals of the Hannon twins, Benchy Prentiss being funny, scrambling and stamping about of feet in there—it sounded a lot better from a distance. He had, right here beside him, all that had brought him to "Restlands" this evening.

"Only," he spoke out of the middle of his thoughts, "I'd like to have you get a dance—if you care about it. You told me you loved to dance."

"I do."

"Then I'd love to dance with you."

He looked back on an uninteresting past of dancing with girls, offering prescribed gallantries at juvenile and junior affairs. Now, for the first time in all his nineteen years, he wanted to take a girl in his arms. Of course—he glanced sidewise at her, found her looking at him, and glanced away quickly—of course, not without the dance. They'd get a chance to go somewhere again together. He'd dance with her—and then—— But how would he get his chance, unless they had some way of communicating? Look at the last three days, what a time he'd had!

"When I want to get word to you why can't I write you a note and just post it?" he asked.

"One of the girls would be sure to notice, if Mrs. Jordan didn't; a note from somebody right here in Siloam, you know. They'd wonder about it—or maybe—no—you couldn't."

"I'd take it over to San Pablo and post it, or Liveoak."

"That—wouldn't be much better," Lynnie deprecated. "But I'll tell you what you could do: You could leave it under a stone somewhere that we'd agreed on—and I'd watch a chance and get it."

"Where?"

She thought for a good while, and he watched her.

"That little hollow where you saw me Saturday morning—when you came back?"

"Yes?"

"Lots of big stones there. If we picked out one and you left a note under it for me I could go get it when I had the chance . . . Oh—what's that?"

Julian had been listening so intently that he forgot everything but Lynnie and their plans. Now he glanced up and saw the two shining eyes of a motor turning in from the road, coming to "Restlands."

"Sit still," he whispered; his hand closed on her arm to hold her. "Probably people we don't know. They couldn't possibly see us here anyhow. Sit still."

The machine came on till it reached the big open space by the side porch. Here the driver began to sound his horn. The noise brought the crowd piling out, Paula first, calling, "Jule—is that you?"

A young fellow jumped from the machine and was making for the steps.

"It's only Curtis Tillman—from San Vicente. I know him. He's in a bank there," Julian whispered.

Not a very important or dramatic statement; but when Elinor Hannon, in the midst of the others, caught sight of the newcomer she cried out suddenly—and Julian got a queer thrill from something in her voice—

"Curt—*dearest!* I didn't know you were going to be down." She ran to him. He took hold of her and kissed her—as though he had a right—just nodding to the others, afterward standing unembarrassed with his arm around her explaining.

"Got a chance to skip over between trains. Had to grab it. Wasn't time to 'phone. I just came past your house and your mother told me where you were."

"I'll go right back with you." Elinor was all in a flutter,

clinging to him. "Can't you stay but just between trains, Curt? Get my sweater and scarf for me—one of you children."

Somebody brought the wraps. Paula herself was heard again asking for Julian.

"Well, that's the queerest thing, the way he disappeared!" she was saying as the crowd got back into the house.

There were the engaged pair lingering down the steps, moving slowly toward Tillman's machine, only half in shadow, murmuring, embraced. Elinor's head was thrown back against her lover's shoulder. Julian saw him bend swiftly and kiss the white throat.

The hand that still held Lynnie's arm trembled. Curtis Tillman—he'd never thought so much of Curt. Elinor Hannon hadn't seemed to him—like that. Sight of the other man's kiss on the white arch of throat seemed to move something deep in Julian's being. While the two over there were climbing into their car and getting started, he leaned forward and shifted his gears, threw in the clutch, and at the moment the other machine was making a noisy start, touched the accelerator.

"What are you going to do?" Lynnie asked, in alarm.

"We can get away at the same time—nobody notice it," Julian whispered back.

"But they—Miss Hannon and the young man that came—wouldn't they see us?" In her anxiety she shrank toward him. He gave her a look.

"Not in a thousand years! Do you suppose they're thinking about us?"

They followed Tillman's car down the lane. He was right; the pair ahead paid no attention to them.

"Where—" Lynnie got no further.

"Over to the hollow. To fix up a post-office. We can't go on missing each other all the time, this way."

"I don't know if the machine can get in there," breathed Lynnie softly.

"Sure it can. It'll go anywhere."

Bumping over roots, sliding in deep sand, tilting perilously on one side, he brought the roadster slowly to a stop where its lights showed twisted, slender trunks of oaks rising from purple fairy-looking beds of iris; drifts of pine needles under the wheels told what the taller trees beyond were. How different it looked at night. He lifted her down and kept her hand.

"Which way to those big stones?" he found himself still whispering, remembered there was no longer any need of that and spoke out louder. "You'll have to lead."

"I'm afraid we can't find one—in the dark."

"I've got my electric torch."

They went a few steps, still hand in hand. Then the ghostly, silvery circle from the torch showed a good-sized stone.

"What do you think of that one?" Lynnie asked, touching it with her foot.

"Try if you can turn it. We don't want to get one that's light enough that somebody'll knock it over—and we don't want to get one that you couldn't move."

"Oh, I never thought of somebody else getting one of the letters!" Lynnie looked a little blank. "Let's not write notes. Let's just leave a sign. You put one of these oak leaves under the stone when you want me to go riding with you that night, or—or to have me meet you there at the corner of the field and I'll—Let's see." She turned the rock back easily; busied herself with a couple of little sticks, and when she had them to her satisfaction put them down on the smooth, moist bit of sand the raising of the boulder had revealed. "See—let's do this way. If they're crossed—so," suiting the action to the word, "it'll mean 'No.' If they're put one right to the end of the other, it'll mean 'Yes.' If they're laid side by side, like this, it'll mean —it might mean—'Wait for me'—mightn't it?"

On his knees beside Lynnie, he got to watching her little work-roughened hands as they pushed the twigs around, and was so slow in following what she said that she laughed at him softly —and showed him the code all over again. Suddenly he saw what she was wearing.

"You'd put on your white dress! You were going down! I'll take you straight back."

"Oh, no I——"

Over at "Restlands" the horn of the Cadillac howled out suddenly—and kept on howling.

Lynnie crouched like a rabbit that hears the hounds. For a moment her eyes were piteous.

"Go—quick," she more shaped the words with her lips than said them. "Leave me here."

Julian sprang up and reached a hand down to help her.

"No, no, I'll get you back to the house all right."

While they were going to the roadster, hand in hand again, the noises over at "Restlands" died down. He lifted her, climbed in himself, saying:

"We'll just run out to the side of the road—I'll leave the lights off—and we'll see what's doing."

At the lane corner the coast looked clear. He streaked up, circled into his place by the Cadillac, Lynnie was out and gone when both doors of the house opened to let out a gabbling, whooping crowd, wraps on ready for departure.

"There's Jule and his Go-devil," Bench Prentiss shouted.

"Where?" Paula cried. "Oh," she came on around to him, stood looking up a moment, then demanded—for all the world, like his mother—"Where have—you—been?"

Most of the others lingered on the porch saying good-night. They were alone for the moment. Angry, thwarted, having had to let Lynnie go without a parting word, he stared back at her. He would have liked to say, "With Lynnie Willis. I'm not the least interested in you. She's the one. If you don't care to have her at your dances and beach parties—you can leave me out." What he finally did say, in a tone that sounded strange to his own ears was:

"Right here—for quite a while—listening to you people."

"Why, Jule," she came close and spoke quickly and excitedly, "What is it? You look so odd." Then, in a little lower tone, "Want to take me home? Benchy can drive the others."

She asked it softly—ah, but not softly enough!

"Well, what do you know about that?" shrieked Zoe Haslett. "Did you hear what Paula's trying to frame up? Wants to duck out with Jule and leave Benchy to strew our remains along the side of the road."

"Not on your tin-take," whined Benchy, crawling into the rear of the Cadillac and pretending to shiver like a whipped dog. "Poor Benchy's a-a-co-o-o-old!" he keened. "Scares me pie-eyed. Somebody take me home and put a hot-water bag to my feet."

"Pretty hostess, I don't think," was Ball Hannon's outraged comment; "trying to go off with a handsomer man than us. Drop the lady, Jule. Take your hypnotic eye off'n her."

Benchy had crawled from the car and slipped up behind Paula.

"Madam, I'll put you back on the job!" He grabbed her up and ran with her to her own car, shoved her into the driver's seat and slammed the door on her.

Through all the clatter Mrs. Jordan stood on the side porch, the girls who had seemed fixtures in their chairs an almost similar fixed row behind her. When there was a lull in the racket, she called:

"I hope you young people will come over here again—now that you've found the way. We enjoyed having you. Thank Mr. McCulloch for his music. I hope he'll come and play for us again some time."

The Go-devil stood where Julian could see a window in the L with its flat shed roof below. He had waited for that little fluttering movement of the curtain. It came now. She was in safe.

With an abrupt, general "Good-night," he wheeled out alone.

CHAPTER V

A PORTUGEE DANCE

WEDNESDAY morning after breakfast, lounging on the ranch-house porch, old Ben out by the fence, opportunity on a blue-eyed pinto pony, came loping down from the wild region at the upper end of the valley in the person of Mateo Gomez, a boy who had once worked for the McCullochs. Idly Julian watched him as he pulled up his bronco, and leaned down talking to Dye with quick gestures and a flash of white teeth.

"Saturday-night dance up at the dance-hall!" the old man turned and bawled genially toward the porch, then added, to Mateo:

"Guess Jule'll go all right. Said he would. But he ain't likely to bring a girl with him."

"Of course I'll bring a girl." Julian ran down the steps two at a time. Here was use for that post-office. How quickly it had come!

"Huh?" old Ben twisted around and cupped his good ear with a hand. Mateo and the waltzing pony bolted quite a way down the road before the young Portuguese could call over his shoulder:

"All right. That's another couple. Saturday night. At the dance-hall. Don't forget the time *and* place." And he scuttered away in a cloud of dust.

"Yah!" old Ben jeered as they went back to the house. "Miss Paula Pollard 'll turn you down so cold it'll freeze you stiff when you ask her to a Portugee dance."

"Probably she would—if I asked her," Julian was too exultant to be cautious, "but I'm going to take a girl to that dance all the same, Uncle Ben."

"Y' are?" Dye asked. "I reckon your mother'd fall dead at the idea of your going to one of them up-the-valley dances,

at that," half sheepishly. "But, shucks! there's nothin' in 'em to hurt you."

He went on about his work. Julian dived into his tent. Half an hour later, when he came out, Dye, sitting at the table in the arbour, sorting a pan of beans, looked around, stared a minute, then blurted:

"Say, Jule, b'lieve you're lookin' better just the few days you've been up here."

Julian was already over by the liveoak getting into the Godevil. The hail followed him, "Be back for dinner—er—lunch?"

He waved a hand and nodded as he passed the old man "full speed ahead" for the hollow, to put that oak leaf under the stone for Lynnie. Three days till Saturday—plenty of time. Yes, but no use taking any chances.

Mateo Gomez had been down to the end of the valley with his invitations, which would of course include the Pachecos; Julian met him in the road as he was turning in for the little hollow and the post-office, and inquired:

"Going to ask the Bruckners?"

"Asked 'em," Mateo pulled up, ready to talk. "Won't any of them come this year. Alma's the only one that would—and Thatch Dye's not in the valley."

They both looked over toward "Restlands." It seemed to be swarming with girls. The new arrivals were making the most of their vacation. Lynnie was nowhere in sight.

"Do you invite them?" Julian asked just to make certain.

"Not worth doin'," Mateo grinned good-humouredly. "Miss Dale Pollard's always asking us ranchers in the valley for contributions—but our dances ain't good enough for her girls—not a-tall."

Out on the kitchen porch where it commanded the road came Mrs. Jordan and stood there looking at them. Instantly Mateo's sombrero was off; he made a flashing bow, all smiling dark eyes and white teeth. Every girl in sight responded. Julian lifted his hat, feeling rather under fire, considering his errand. Somewhat hastily he ran on past, taking the chance to put his message beneath the stone on the return trip.

That evening late he went to get his answer, and found the crossed twigs which meant that she couldn't find a way to meet

him. He threw them out impatiently, and put his leaf back. Thursday was a repetition of Wednesday, so far as any success was concerned. He hung around till it seemed Bruckner on the one hand, or those at "Restlands" on the other, would certainly notice his being in the neighbourhood so much. Friday—still no luck. Saturday—the day itself—he had to see her. He ran the Go-devil down so early that he thought surely no one would be out of bed yet. But when he got to the turnout there was Lynnie herself passing on her way to Bruckners' for the milk. He ran in, stopped his machine, and waited for her to come back. At sight of him she checked, plainly scared, glanced back toward Bruckner, in plain view of them in the milking lot. But Julian jumped down from the machine and ran to her.

"Want to go to a dance—up the valley—with me—to-night?"

The magnitude of the thing seemed to steady her. She paid no more attention to Bruckner back there among his cows. She set down the covered milkpail and stood looking at Julian a minute as though he had proposed an excursion to the Kingdom of Heaven. He had no need of other answer than the overwhelmingly, almost agonisedly eager look she gave him before her eyes filled with tears. She lowered them and pushed out a foot on which the broken shoe gaped as she twisted it a bit.

"These are all I've got," she said. "I'd have time to wash and iron my white middy suit." She looked up at him again with those drowned, longing child's eyes. "It would do for a dance like that. But shoes——"

"I'll get 'em for you," Julian disposed of the matter in five words. "You'll have to have slippers to dance in, anyhow. I guess I can find something decent in San Pablo. What number do you wear?"

"Three and a half, B." Lynnie stooped swiftly and picked up her pail; she glanced around. "I must run. I—I'll find a way to get off to-night."

"Sure you will. And I'll find a way to get the slippers to you—put them right in at your window. Will that be all right?"

"Oh, yes—of course. I've still got the room to myself. The others are all in the big dormitory."

It was seven o'clock. She ran, milk-pail in hand, his little blue gingham girl, and gained the "Restlands" yard before he ventured down the lane.

When he got back to the ranch and breakfast old Ben scared him nearly to death by asking him suddenly at the table:

"Where d'ye go this morning so early, Jule?" and then while he was trying to think up a suitable answer, "Were you as far as 'Restlands'?"

He sat and looked at his end of the table a minute before he answered, "Yes." That hardly seemed enough, and he added, "Why, Uncle Ben?"

"Nothin', only I promised a sack o' spuds to 'em, and I'd have sent it down by you if I'd known. Miss Dale's got a houseful, an' makin' the valley support it, as per usual."

"I'll take them for you later to-day, Uncle Ben," Julian said. "I've got to go in to San Pablo. Any errands for me?"

It seemed the old man had. He gave a list of groceries; a pair of boots to be got from where they were being half-soled; hinges for the gate; five pounds of eight-penny nails.

When Julian passed "Restlands" on his way in to town there were plenty of girls about, and this time, over on the kitchen porch, was Lynnie. She saw him and waved her hand to him as he drove by, an exquisite little muted gesture for his eye alone.

Never in his life had Julian felt as he did when he turned into the road, going to town to get shoes for Lynnie. It would be the first thing he had given her. This was thrillingly real. Swinging around a curve on the beautiful San Pablo grade across the range, he suddenly thought of something else he could get her. Silk stockings, to go with the slippers.

In San Pablo that early he had the stores all to himself. He remembered Lynnie's "my white middy frock," and decided that white slippers would be the thing. At the first place he tried they wanted to sell him canvas, then admitted that they hadn't any other in the size he wanted, and brought out some white satin ones that he was sure would have been too big for her. He went to another store and found some pretty nice looking white satin slippers with a small chiffon rosette like a little camellia, dotted over with pearl beads. It was the best he could do. He bought them and took them with him when he went to get the silk stockings.

The saleswoman at the Emporium, finding him an easy customer, one who pushed aside her first offering and asked if

she hadn't something better, having sold him the more expensive hose, called his attention to silk underwear in the same department.

"We're making a drive on that." Julian saw the woman's eye sizing up everything he had on, as they do in these little country stores; he knew she'd have said he looked like money. "You may not care so much about a bargain—though these times most everybody does—but you'll never see a vest like this." She took the little slim, dainty pink silk thing from the rack where it was hung and spread it on her hands, showing him the embroidery on the front. "You'll never see goods like that as cheap again; not even in San Francisco. Ain't it pretty? Let me tell you those things are going up in price."

He nodded, without a word. His throat seemed to have closed up. She took that for assent, laid the vest with the stockings, and turned to dive for some boxes down behind the counter with a brisk, "You'll want the knickers to go with the vest, I suppose." She brought up the box of silk knickerbockers. "Large, small, or medium?"

"Small," at a venture.

"Of course—with that vest. I could have fitted you out with everything yesterday—but these goods are going so fast. Would you want the camisole? And a crêpe de Chine petticoat? Maybe we've got one crêpe de Chine petticoat left in this shade of flesh pink—or would you rather have white—with the white hose? Here's a lovely white one. Want it?"

He bought whatever the woman said. When Lynnie's parcel was put up it was not very large, but he was glad it had cost as much as it had. Then the saleswoman succeeded in selling him a sweater for himself. He hadn't any particular use for an extra-heavy, coarse grey sweater, but he felt a gratitude which made him want to be obliging to her. He tossed his bundle into the roadster and forgot it, but the package of Lynnie's things lay beside him on the seat. When he went on to the grocery to get the things for old Ben he couldn't leave it there. Something might happen to it; he took it into the store, and carried it about with him as he ordered the groceries. It lay on the empty chair by him when he stopped in at The Coffee Club and had lunch. He put a newspaper that he picked up there around it and the shoe box, binding them together.

At home once more, he asked for an early supper, and dressed before it for the dance, taking a good deal of time. When he went over to the arbour Uncle Ben turned him around by the arm and surveyed him.

"Got up to kill *an'* cripple," the old man pronounced solemnly. It was not till after they had eaten and he was leaving that the reminder came, "You forgot to take them spuds down to 'Restlands'."

"I didn't forget. Take them now."

"What—a sack of potatoes—on your way to a dance?" snorted Dye. "Shucks—let 'em wait till to-morrow."

"No, I've got to drive that far anyhow."

"Still bound to make me believe you're goin' down there after Miss Paula Pollard. Don't fool me—not so's you could notice it. I know you're going to the dance without any girl."

Julian drove so fast that "Restlands" was still at table when he got there. The coast was clear. He brought the long bamboo fishing-rod from his roadster, fixed Lynnie's bundle on the end, and flipped it in at the open window above the shed roof, then carried the sack of potatoes boldly up to the kitchen door and rapped.

Luck ought to have given him Lynnie to open that door for him. It did not. He could see her though, in at the range, getting a pan of something from the oven. She caught sight of him, and instantly her cheeks were like fire, her eyes cast down, but not before he had nodded reassuringly, and sent a quick, significant glance upward.

The girl who opened the door went to fetch Mrs. Jordan to receive the contribution and thank him for it. He had hoped to carry the sack in; but he wasn't quick enough. As soon as she saw it, the matron took hold of one end, the girl who had brought her the other. Julian got away, feeling rather foolish, went out and drove the Go-devil slowly down as far as the Mission. Looking at his watch he found he had used up only ten minutes. Why, they wouldn't have finished eating! Dishes to wash after the meal. He turned back, extending the upper loop as far as he dared. He came down once more, half an hour disposed of, nervous, listening, looking. Suppose somebody went into that room and found her bundle! Of course not. She had understood when he nodded; Lynnie always had her

wits about her. Down past Bruckners' again; up as far as the crossroads where the coast road went through; going slower and slower, getting more and more uneasy; it was nearly an hour before he did finally pick her up, far down the road, dressed for the dance, and in a tremor of delight.

"Heavens, what an hour I've had out here!" he said as he reached over and helped her get in. "Scared stiff—for you."

"Were you?" a little dismay in her tone. "Why, I was all right. My room's locked now. Nobody'll touch the door till morning. I was all right."

She had the white slippers and her handkerchief in a little bundle; the crêpe de Chine petticoat swished softly as she settled herself.

"Oh!" she whispered, "I didn't know you were going to get me so—so much. The slippers fit perfectly. I never had such —beautiful ones—in my life."

It was thrilling to think of her wearing those things he had bought and carried around this morning.

"Why didn't you put the slippers on?" he asked.

"And ruin them, walking in the sand?" She unwrapped and looked at them in the light from over the speedometer. "Lovely!" raising one to her cheek, and rubbing the satin softly against it.

At last they were off. Julian made pretty good speed. As they passed the Hannon place—a suburban-looking house, the Hannons lived the year round in the valley, the father of the family had one store in San Pablo and one in Liveoak—they saw the Ford at the gate.

"They're not going up," Julian reassured Lynnie. "Car's headed the wrong way."

"I guess nobody much is from this end of the valley." She hesitated for quite a while and then added in a reluctant tone, "but I kind of wish that, when we get there, you'd go in ahead —and see."

Julian drove more slowly for a moment, thinking.

"Suppose there is some one there that knows us both—would you back out?" he asked her.

"Oh, no—but then we needn't go in together. Maybe we'd better not go in together, anyhow."

"I don't see how that would help it," he argued. "If they find you've slipped off to a dance——"

"Well," the mild little voice checked him, "anyhow it wouldn't bring you into it."

She was taking care of him.

"Never you mind about me," he smiled. "But if you think it would be any better for you, I'll go ahead and spy out the land."

Further up they passed a buggy full of people going to the dance; then a single horseman.

"We aren't the very latest, anyhow," Lynnie said. She was in great spirits. Then, ahead, light, noise, and the shadowy outline of a building that Julian remembered from his daylight knowledge of it as a board-and-batten structure set by the roadside with steps going up to a platform porch. Every window, and the wide-open door, blazed a welcome. When they came opposite they could see the crowd in there, big kerosene lamps with tin reflectors on the walls. Out in front were ponies, buggies, farm wagons, one or two machines—an unhandy mess to get the car through. Julian slowed down.

"I'll take the machine around to the back," he suggested. "I'll leave you in it, there, and have a look. If the coast's clear I'll come and get you."

"All right," breathed Lynnie.

He found a good place in the shadow of the house for the Go-devil, left Lynnie, and hurried around to the front, where a lot of men standing, stirring uneasily, talking in low tones, gave a queer suggestion of cattle stamping and mooing and looking over a fence.

Mateo of the invitations was on the porch.

"Hello," he hailed, "you didn't bring a girl after all!"

Julian let it stand at that. He pushed his way through the press at the door and looked into the room. There on chairs sat the grandmothers that Julian had heard Ben Dye declare were all good dancers; mountainous old ladies, gaily dressed in figured cottons; smiling, yet dignified. They knew their worth. They were well aware that the third generation would see that they didn't lack for partners.

Not a soul he had ever seen before in his life, except Mateo, and a man he passed on the porch who had a strangely familiar face and who had spoken to him and called him Mr. McCulloch. To make assurance doubly sure he took another look,

and was about to turn back for Lynnie; but there she was on the porch with two girls. The man out there who had spoken to him stopped them and evidently asked for a dance, for one of the girls with Lynnie said gaily:

"Let us get our slipeprs on, won't you?" She spoke with the soft little lisp that Spanish usage gives the English. Julian stood and let the three pass him near the doorway. Mateo, beside him, looked after them as they went, remarking:

"The Sanchez girls—from Coyote. Must have rode nearly all day to get here."

Julian watched the bright head go down the crowded room between the two dark heads. One of the girls had her arm around Lynnie's waist. When the door shut behind the three Julian came back to his surroundings. He found a place against the wall to watch and wait for her.

Finally Lynnie came through the battened door at the head of the room, and he quickly made his way to her. The dark coat was off. She wore the new slippers. The little white middy suit made her look childish, with its soft triangle of throat that was almost whiter—a sort of luminous white. It was a new Lynnie who smiled so with scarlet-threaded lips a little apart because of quick breathing, bright hair all loosened out and curling around her forehead. The delicate little face sparkled with happiness. She didn't look timid now. He had a passing sense of gratitude toward the roomful of dark-faced, foreign-speaking people who would accept himself and her as human beings; even those two girls, who had made their own changes of course, from boots to slippers, and tucked red bows coquettishly in dark braids over a left ear, were to him only a background for Lynnie—Lynnie at a dance, happy, confident.

Then he forgot the rest of them, even as background. He was dancing with Lynnie—at last. How well they moved together. He looked down at her face, close in toward his shoulder, his breast; it wasn't like dancing with any girl heretofore. She looked back at him. She had said she loved to dance, yet he knew somehow that this was as different for her as it was for him. He had an unformulated rush of good will toward the whole world. A first-rate floor; dandy music—a banjo, a guitar, and an accordion; all three played with wonderful zip and

swing—and Lynnie, here in his arms; this was worth all the trouble he'd gone to for it.

But dances come to an end—the musicians see to that. When the music was over, and they were standing at the side of the room, Julian saw, coming toward them, the man who had called him Mr. McCulloch. He had full, dark eyes of an animal brightness, like those of a stag; curling brown hair; a fuzz of curling brown beard, too, unshaven on the blooming cheeks. Julian thought he had had a drink, and he was eyeing Lynnie so pointedly that Julian drew himself up and tried a little looking on his own account. The Portuguese paid no attention.

"Leenie," he cried, "you didn't give me my dance."

"I didn't promise you any."

"I thought you did. Well, this one, then."

The music started up. Without a word Julian slipped an arm around her. The Portuguese fell back disappointed as they began to move.

"The next, Tony," Lynnie spoke across Julian's very shoulder.

"Who was that fellow—calling you Leenie?" he demanded.

"Tony De Vega," she laughed up into his face. "The man you nearly ran down Sunday."

"Well, I'll do worse to him than 'nearly'," Julian threatened, "if he doesn't quit calling you by your first name."

Then he forgot Tony De Vega, and everything else unpleasant. Lynnie certainly could dance. Her joy in it seemed to envelop them both. But there was De Vega watching to claim the next. Julian hadn't reckoned with this, somehow. Looking forward he had seen himself dancing with Lynnie all evening. He told her so now, and she looked a little dismayed.

"Oh, we couldn't," she said gently. "You ask one of the others. They're good dancers. It's—it's their dance, you know. And they're so nice to us."

All the same he was glad that De Vega got only an old-fashioned Lancers—and jealous of all the other men in the set when they held her hand and swung her. He stood and looked on. These were a graceful people, with their queer, gaudy dressing. Good dancers, too. When De Vega brought Lynnie back to him she said in a smiling whisper:

"You ought to have asked one of the other girls."

"I don't want to dance with anybody but you," he objected,

knowing that he was a grouch. "But I will next time," he added, as the musicians began a waltz.

He'd promised, yet she had to prompt him to ask one of the old ladies. Another waltz with Lynnie—and she wheedled him into dancing with the girl who had come in with her.

The Sanchez girl danced well, but during their waltz Lynnie, of course, was with another partner. Julian winced. A Portuguese dance was all right for him; he liked it better than swell affairs in the past; but when it came to Lynnie—— He was prickles all over. Not jealous—nothing like that; but—— And all the time Tony De Vega kept following her about, asking for dances. Finally Julian couldn't stand any more.

"I wish you wouldn't dance with that fellow," he said as she nestled in the curve of his arm and they swung along in a waltz.

"I won't, if you don't want me to. I know him better than the others. He brings wood to 'Restlands.' His wife died just a little while ago."

"What the deuce is he doing at a dance, then?" Julian demanded hotly.

Lynnie looked up at him; her eyes were that wonderful black of a night sky with stars in it that they got when she was excited. Her colour shifted so that the pink was like a rosy light in her cheeks. She laughed, yet said rather soberly,

"Why, he's noticing."

"Noticing?"

"Yes. That's what they say about widowers when they begin looking around for another wife."

"For a——?"

Their waltz was the last dance before supper. Its music ceased in the middle of Julian's inquiry. He made a dive at a chair and got it for Lynnie; they were going to be scarce. He stood beside his lady while big, fat sandwiches and bigger, fatter cakes were passed around, and Mateo and a very pretty girl dragged a wash-boiler of coffee about the floor in front of the seated guests, leaving a trail of soot where it went. Cups and saucers had been handed first; another pretty girl followed with sugar and cream. Julian had just filled Lynnie's cup and was waiting on her when Tony De Vega, walking carefully straight down the line, came to them and stood looking. His great, full, dark eyes had got a little more shine; the swarthy bloom on

his cheeks was redder. The drink that Julian had suspected had certainly been reinforced by another; perhaps two.

"Oh, here you are, Leenie," he gazed at her and spoke to her as though there were no one else in the room. While Julian, furious, hesitated as to what one could say or do under the circumstances—at a Portuguese dance—De Vega dropped down on the other side of Lynnie, close against her, sitting on his heels, cowboy fashion, rolling his big, dark eyes to look up into her face, speaking in what he apparently thought was a low tone.

"Dulcie—what's the matter you won't dance with me any more?"

"Oh, I'm having my supper now, Tony."

"But you've rif-fuse me two times—three times, I think. Is it because I been drinking—a li'l?"

"Oh, no."

"Well, I'm not drunk—me," the Portuguese argued. "I know what I'm about. I know what I'm saying."

Lynnie's face was painfully flushed. She sat looking into her coffee-cup.

"Listen, Dulcie," De Vega began again, nudging her knee with his shoulder to attract her attention, "have you made up your mind—about what I asked you?"

Julian could not restrain a forward movement; the fellow was drunker than he'd supposed. Lynnie gave him an apprehensive glance before she answered hastily.

"Oh—I didn't think anything about what you said, Tony. You didn't mean it. Don't let's talk about it now. Let's just have supper, and——"

"Aw, Dulcie! you know I mean it," Tony reproached. "But that's all right, too. I'll have supper. Bring that boiler back here, Matt! Gimme a cup of coffee."

Mateo stopped the coffee boiler beside him and the pretty girl served him, with a kind of good-natured contempt.

"You!" she said, as she handed the filled cup, and noted the glances he gave Lynnie, "You look with your eyes like a seek cow."

Tony laughed, spilling coffee all over himself.

"Going to dance with me again after supper, Dulcita?" he demanded of Lynnie.

"No, she is not," Julian said sharply. Lynnie's hand went

out on that side to restrain him. But De Vega paid no attention. Apparently he hadn't heard.

"I—I'm tired, Tony,"—she did look distressed and fagged. Julian's temper rose the more. "I'm so tired—maybe I won't dance any more this evening—with anybody."

"Aw—say! Not too tired to go with me to-night——" De Vega faced round to her and set a knee squarely down on the floor, sending his coffee-cup rolling. He never noticed it. "That pony I was telling you about—that Amigo pony of mine—he's awful easy riding. You'd think you was in a rocking-chair——"

"You, Tony De Vega—pick up that cup!" It was one of the Spanish girls speaking to him. "Now get up from there while I mop the place—we're going to dance till daylight on this floor."

Courteously, but with some difficulty, De Vega rose. In the moment his attention was turned, Lynnie slipped away. She made for the door. Julian followed her out on the porch. They found Mateo rolling a cigarette. He and his girl had been relieved by another pair. Supper had called everybody else inside.

"What did he mean—go with him?" Julian spoke as soon as they were out in the dark. "Where did he want you to go?"

"Oh—nowhere," Lynnie evaded. "He's just been drinking, and——"

"Wanted her to get on the pony behind him and ride over to San Pablo to be married by the J. P. there," Mateo's girl spoke up. "These darned widowers have got their nerve! Why didn't you slap his face for him, Leenie?"

"What?" Julian wheeled, ready for war. Then De Vega himself blundered through the door, going a little faster because two of the older men were trying to hold him back. They were speaking in rapid, loud Spanish. All Julian got was the repeated name——

"Antonio! Antonio!" As they came out on the porch one of the grey-haired peacemakers broke into English.

"See—the little lady doesn't want to be bothered with you, Antonio. She's got her own fella. You hadn't ought——"

"Leggo!" Tony was squirming and shaking himself. "You're not my boss, Uncle Esteban." He spoke thickly, yet with an attempt at respect to his relative. "The little girl herself can

give me my answer. She's got no fella. She come with the Sanchez girls; I seen her. Where is she? Oh—there you are, Leenie. Now, Dulcie——"

No fellow? Something seemed to go off in Julian's brain. He pushed Lynnie behind him and faced De Vega, flaming. He heard himself speaking as though it were another. The words were none of his choosing.

"That's my girl you're talking to. She's mine. Say what you've got to say to me."

"Why?" Tony balanced himself and blinked. "I didn't know you was with her. I didn't know," he repeated; then with a sudden flare, "But certainly I'll say it. I'll say it to you, or to any gentleman. I asked her——"

"No, no!" Lynnie pulled at Julian's arm and tried to get past it.

"Do you tell me no?" Tony's forward movement was menacing.

"Just wait—Tony—wait!"

The sharp distress of Lynnie's voice evidently abashed her suitor. His uncle took advantage of his weakening to get a firmer hold on him and pull him back. There was a tense moment when every one stood rigid, and nothing was heard but the sound of heavy breathing. Then Mateo's girl spoke waveringly.

"Shame, Tony! If Cousin Juana could see you this minute——"

This reminder of his dead wife was curiously effective; Tony seemed to go limp in the hands that restrained him. He wept noisily as his relatives made haste to drag him away.

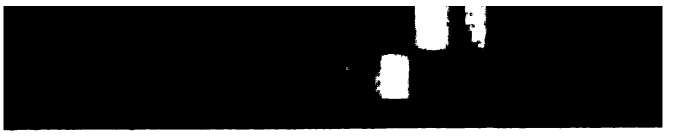
"I don't like the looks of that," Mateo's cigarette had gone out. He struck another match, sliding a glance toward Julian.

"When Tony gets to crying—look out for him," added the girl.

"Oh—let's go," Lynnie pleaded.

"I expect it's the best thing you can do," Mateo had already said, when the door opened and the second man who had been in charge of Tony looked out. He called to Mateo in Spanish. Julian understood that he was asking if they were gone. Then, as his eyes became accustomed to the darkness——

"Oh—there you are, Meester McCulloch. Too bad—you come a guest like this and have anything happen; but I think you



gotta take your girl out of Tony's sight. Y' see, he's just had enough to make him crazee. They talk to him in there now; they try to get him to behave. But I think it's better you beat it while the beatin's good. Daisy—get the little lady's shawl or whatever it was she had around her. Better go out this way —not cross the room in front of him—see?"

In silence they waited. Daisy slipped into the dance-hall for Lynnie's coat, and was back in no time. They were hustled off. Julian dropped an arm around Lynnie in a rush for the machine.

"Needn't be scared," he whispered as he half lifted her along. "I'll take care of you."

"I'm not scared, now," she was panting.

Noise and loud voices behind them; then a shot.

"Matt!" somebody yelled. "I thought you got that gun away from him. Damn it! You dassn't let him have a gun when he's like this!"

Julian tightened the arm around Lynnie; he swung her up and ran with her. She clung about his neck. He could feel her heart plunging against his own. They were at the machine; he put her in, jumped to the seat and took the wheel.

"Sit tight now!" he cried unsteadily. He felt a strange exaltation, as though Lynnie's heart still beat against his own, as though he had two hearts. "We've got to drive back right through them—I'll go fast."

"Don't run over anybody," Lynnie quavered as the starter took hold. The engine roared, the Go-devil leaped up the slope and whizzed past the porch edge.

There was a glimpse of light and movement, an outburst of excited yelps in three languages; in the next breath it was all left behind; they were off down the road like a streak.

Julian held the pace for a mile or more; out of sight and hearing behind the shoulder of a low ridge, he slowed down and looked around at Lynnie. They were both in a great flurry. He, particularly, had felt the world heave up and turn over.

A man wanted to marry Lynnie. He fought his friends and howled to get to her—to carry her off on his horse and marry her to-night. How did she feel about it? He discovered all at once that Lynnie was shuddering from head to foot.

"You still so frightened?" he asked softly.

"I'm not scared—I'm cold," she shivered. "This isn't my

coat Daisy got. This is thinner." Julian stopped the roadster and reached into the boot.

"We'll fix that," he said as he drew out the unopened bundle which contained his sweater purchase of the morning. "This'll keep you warm, anyhow."

He shook out the big, heavy garment, and slipped it on her, over coat and all, pulling its collar around her neck, buttoning it up as though she had been a baby. As though she had been a baby she raised her face, and let him move her as he would. He didn't know why he just buttoned the sweater on her and asked her in a sort of stifled whisper, "Is that all right?" It seemed a maimed action that he should let it go at that, start up the machine and move on.

After it they talked in short, hurried sentences—laughing nervously, a bit constrained and conscious, Julian thinking all the time, "Why didn't I kiss her? She wouldn't fight me off." When they got out of the machine and she was to take the usual short-cut path through the chaparral toward "Restlands," she stopped and began unbuttoning the sweater. It seemed almost as though she lingered waiting to be caught up, to be held. But somehow he couldn't—then. Instead, he said in a constrained whisper:

"Keep it on. I'm going to walk all the way over to the edge of the clearing with you to-night.

The moon was down. He put his arm around her on the narrow trail, walked the hundred yards of dark, crooked pathway so hedged in by the tall, thick chaparral, with its spicy smells, its deep silence tenderly stirred by the chirp and flutter of tiny nested birds. When they came to the end of it, and parting, he continued to hold her. They stood there and talked whisperingly of when they next could go somewhere together. Presently, there in the dark, she let him take the sweater off—a thrilling business.

"What'll you do about having the other girl's cloak?" he asked.

"Oh, Tony'll bring mine down."

"Yes—and tell that you lost it up at the dance!"

"He won't," Lynnie said. "I'll get to see him first and ask him——"

"I don't like to have you ask favours of that fellow," jealously. "I don't want to have you see him at all."

"Tony's all right—when he's sober. He——"

"Has he ever talked to you about marrying him—before to-night?" accusingly.

"Not about marrying him."

"Well, I'll settle Tony—after this."

"The moon's changed," she murmured. "It'll be full next Saturday."

"Will it?' he said vaguely; he was preoccupied with the tingle of her hair along his cheek as they stood so close in the little path.

"Yes—full moon—next Saturday. There'll be a big crowd at 'Restlands' then. Miss Dale's bringing more girls, and we're going to have our hay-ride and beach supper down beyond the Mission."

"Well, I'll go to it. It'll give me a chance to see you, anyhow," Julian said.

"Yes, and I expect there won't be any chance till then," Lynnie's little voice was plaintive. "We'll have so much to do —and it isn't easy to get away evenings, when there's a moon."

"Well, I'm going to try every night."

Suddenly he bent and kissed her—a mere dab of a boy's eager, awkward kiss, that lit somewhere near her ear. But the contact reverberated through his being like a thunderbolt. She drew back a little.

"You're not mad?" Huskily, tremulously, he made the ancient query that has been made since there was ever a first kiss.

"No." Lynnie breathed softly.

He longed to kiss her again . . . but it was denied him. He wasn't afraid of her, nor terribly embarrassed . . . still . . . somehow he . . . just couldn't.

Slowly she began to move away, sighing, "Good-bye, Julian."

"Good-bye, Lynnie."

She was leaving him. Already she was hardly more than a little wavering shadow, a rustling in the soft night. Oh, why had he let her go like that? Why hadn't he kissed her again? Why hadn't he taken her in his arms, held her close, kissed her as he thirsted to kiss her—as she wanted to be kissed?

He turned and stumbled back alone through the scented chaparral, dizzy with a strange, mingled sense of exaltation and defeat.

CHAPTER VI

FULL MOON

FOR a week he had but memory of the kiss he had taken, regrets for the kiss he had not dared to take. Once only had he found a chance to speak to Lynnie, though he hung persistently around their post-office in the hollow, putting his leaf under the stone with its steady urgency, "I've got to see you," finding when he came for answer the little crossed sticks that meant, "No."

His life was a stream that flowed with surface and depths. Talking to old Ben; being joked by him about Paula and the other girls; making use of the young people's affairs in the valley—or anybody's affairs that would serve—to get closer to "Restlands" and Lynnie—that was the surface. The depths were all of her. In a swift, steady current, unseen, powerful, his thoughts set ever toward her with a longing that was as distinct as hunger or thirst.

Sometimes he took these hidden dreams, this longing of his, with him up to the lookout on Old Bitter, and lay there wondering why everything in the valley looked different to him now. It was the same place, the same mountains and river, the road linking up the same dwellings, with the same people in them.

Ah, but the old adobe down there held Lynnie! In the south wall, out of sight, was her window—The Window—with its friendly bit of flat shed roof below.

Before his solitude came again the picture of Curtis Tillman and Elinor Hannon. He couldn't associate what he had seen that night in the side yard of "Restlands" with Curt's face behind the bank wicket when you went to get your money—Tillman was paying-teller in the Citizens National Bank of which Stephen McCulloch was a director. Julian's allowance was paid over to him there, often by Curt himself, who had seemed up to now just a fellow with a thin neck, prominent

teeth, and much dignity. He wore a high collar that he seemed to be struggling to get over so that he might say, "Good morning." Who would have guessed—and again came that heart-shaking vision of Curtis Tillman—Curt Tillman—bending swift, hot, privileged lips to kiss the throat of his sweetheart!

His last card from his mother—she used a correspondence card on him, as if to advertise that she hadn't anything much to say to him—had demanded a list of the young people in the valley. Young people in the valley! What did she mean by that? He knew well enough. She meant the kind she'd picked out in Las Reudas and San Vicente for his social circle; she meant Paula Pollard and Zoe Haslett and Pret Consadine. People like the Hannons and Ashbys she didn't think much of. A girl from the "Restlands" camp wouldn't count at all. Well, Lynnie counted with him. She counted so much that she was the whole thing.

When he had got his glimpse of Lynnie, walking with two other girls, in the road, she dropped a little behind them and motioned to her sleeve, showing that she wore her own coat. De Vega must have brought it down. The thought was disturbing. If he had it to do over. . . . Recollection of Tony daring to push his shoulder in against Lynnie's knee in that way as he crouched there beside her, lithe, eager-eyed, begging her to marry him, made the boy lying in the oats patch feel like a cave man whose mate was interfered with. If he had known what Tony was saying! Suppose he, Julian, hadn't been there? Would she have ridden off on the pony behind De Vega? Would she to-day be De Vega's——? No—no, of course not! There it was again—this fool stuff about classes, and social distinctions. Social distinctions! We don't have any in America. The people who pretended that way would hold that Tony De Vega was fit to marry Lynnie. The mere thought spurred him, goaded him fierily, gave him new boldness.

Under its impulsion, he went ahead of time Saturday evening to "Restlands," asking if there was anything he could carry down to the beach for them. He found Mrs. Jordan in the side yard wearing a faded old khaki outing-suit and shapeless cotton beach hat. The ten or fifteen girls—poor things—how excited they were over their little outing! Bruckner's farm wagon with hay in it was already turning in at the upper

end of the yard. The "Restlands" contingent would ride down that way.

Mrs. Jordan said they were going to broil bacon, make coffee, and heat the mulligan over the beach fire; she'd be glad to have Julian take down the camp kettle, the pot of stew, and demijohns of water. When she called for these Lynnie and two other girls came bringing them. He jumped out and ran to help. There was a breathless moment as he took the heavy kettle from Lynnie's hand. She kept a lighter one, with:

"Let me carry this—you might spill it." It gave her a chance to go on with him to the roadster. He thought to have got a whispered word with her there, though Mrs. Jordan was close, but some one called from the steps.

"Hello, Jule McCulloch!"

"It's Rose Daggett," Lynnie murmured. "Miss Dale brought her and three other girls." Then Rose herself came running down the steps and got a black look from Mrs. Jordan.

"Go tell the rest of 'em the wagon's here," the matron said, and she closed in on Julian and Lynnie, taking a hand at the stowing of the kettles, cutting off any chance at a further word between them. It didn't make so much difference; they had the whole evening before them.

But down at the beach it seemed there were two fires; beside one Paula Pollard, Miss Dale, and a Frenchman named Lemaire, a fellow brought down to make photographs for the *Messenger;* Julian found himself with them, separated from Lynnie and the "Restlands" party at the other fire.

There were gorgeous rainbow edges on the big, shaking banners of flame that went up from the driftwood. The full moon, well above the Santa Monicas, turned the whole bay to silver; the waters down there gathered themselves in one great wave and beat like a heart on the crescent of sand. Julian felt his own heart beat in throbbing unison with the white night, the mysterious sea.

Paula kept talking to him. He hadn't much idea what she said, and if anything, less notion what he answered. For he could sometimes get a glimpse of Lynnie over at the cooking fire where Mrs. Jordan had her girls at work getting the mulligan hot, the coffee made, the lunch laid out on a long cloth.

"Aunt Dale says she saw your mother just before she left

for the East, and promised we'd try to make it pleasant for you in Siloam this summer. I told her I didn't know where you'd been keeping yourself lately."

"Oh, just fooling around—up at the ranch—I suppose," hurriedly. Lynnie was coming across from the other fire. For the minute he could not see or hear or think clearly of anything else.

"Mrs. Jordan says—" Lynnie spoke full in the rosy glow. She kept smiling, looking at Miss Dale—not at him; but he knew she was conscious of his eyes on her, as he, to his very fingertips, was conscious of her nearness— "Mrs. Jordan says will you come down to the big table, or shall I serve you where you are?"

"Over here, dear," Miss Dale smiled up at the ambassador. "I'm too lazy to move. But you come eat with us. Let one of the other girls wait on us. You've done enough."

Julian's heart leaped with gratitude to Miss Dale. He had known her for a long time. His mother had her at the house a great deal. She said it was a mercy when there was a lady on a newspaper to do the society reporting. He got quickly to his feet.

"Couldn't I help, Miss Pollard?"

"It would be awfully good of you, Julian—but I oughtn't to ask you——" She looked doubtfully from Julian to Paula.

"I suppose I should offer," suggested Lemaire.

"Not at all," Miss Dale said. "This is the girls' party. They expect to play hostess."

But Julian walked away beside Lynnie. Crossing between the two fires with trays, he whispered,

"Slip off as soon as you can and go up the path toward the Mission."

"I will."

After that the food was ambrosia, the coffee nectar, the moonlit beach with its throbbing surf and white sands a fairyland.

Dale Pollard put his feelings into very inadequate words when she sighed,

"Heavens, but it's lovely down here! I think sometimes it's the loveliest spot on earth—and the most romantic."

The serving was over now; they were all eating. Lynnie had shaken her head when he wanted to sit beside her. Of course she

was right. But it left him with Paula again. Inconspicuously, he widened the distance a bit, but still she leaned across it and spoke,

"Julian, let's get up a beach supper—for ourselves."

"For ourselves?" he repeated her words questioningly. He was perfectly willing to make use of Paula to get to Lynnie, but that was as far as he went.

"Yes—the Hannons and the Ashby girls, and"—she lowered her voice—"I'd ask Alma Bruckner this time, if you wanted me to. We could get boys from San Pablo and Liveoak."

He looked at her noncommittally. She had offered Alma Bruckner; would she think of another name? She did not. She glanced around her, drew a little closer, and lowered her tone still more:

"Seems a shame to waste such a perfectly good night as this." Then, in answer to his interrogative air, "It would be so lovely here—if we had the right crowd."

"Yes, it would." Julian enjoyed the double meaning of his words. It made him smile.

"Well, we'd have to be quick about it," Paula considered. "I'm going up to town with Aunt Dale when she leaves. If we didn't have it to-morrow night we'd have to wait till I get back."

"Let's wait, then," said Julian laconically. He had seen Lynnie taking the cups of Lemaire and Miss Pollard to get them refilled. He jumped to his feet to follow.

"Where are you going?" Paula detained him.

"Over to the fire—for some stew."

"Get me some, too—won't you?" She handed up her paper plate. He overtook Lynnie before she reached the cooking fire, and questioned as they moved side by side,

"Had all the supper you want?"

"Yes."

"So've I. I'll take this grub back. You go on up the path and wait for me. I'll be with you in a minute."

With a nod Lynnie moved away in the moonlight. Julian went on to the fire, handed Lemaire and Miss Pollard their filled cups, delivered Paula's replenished plate to her, and took care—now that his arrangement with Lynnie was happily completed—to excuse himself with a little more definiteness and courtesy. Paula looked at him uneasily. He thought if she

hadn't just asked for the refilling of her plate she might have offered to go with him. But he forgot her when he found a little figure over by the rocks, waiting.

"Shall we go up on the bank and walk there?" he whispered. His arm was around her the minute he touched her, but she glanced uneasily at the crowd by the fire.

"Too far away to see us," he said softly; but, eager as he was, he couldn't quite try to kiss her there.

All the way up the twisted climb he kept his arm around her, though she could perhaps have made it better unhelped. When they stood on the grassy plateau above the beach he still held her, and would have drawn her closer, but she leaned away from him; looking back at the noisy supper crowd.

"They could see us—here," she whispered. "We're right where the firelight strikes."

"Come on, then—let's go up to the Mission. That's what I meant to do in the first place. I know where the key's kept."

They started together across the grass; Lynnie was nervous about meeting some one from the Pachecos'.

"We can get into the Mission, and go up in the belfry. It'll be beautiful up there, on a night like this."

The old key hung on the nail in the niche by the side door. They let themselves in. Julian knew that this was the baptistry, though the moonlight barely shone enough for them to make out that it was a small room with a great cave of chill blackness beyond which was the main room of the stone-paved church. As he was locking the door Lynnie pressed close to him, a little timid, he thought, of the big, dark place. He guided her to the winding stone steps, worn into shallow troughs, leading to the belfry. Now that they were alone together, there was again that nervous disposition to talk fast—and let queer silences drop in between. His hand closed on her arm helping her up the stairs, and he remembered.

"This is your own coat, isn't it? Did De Vega bring it?"

Lynnie laughed noncommittally.

"Oh, Tony'd be ashamed of the way he acted, next morning."

They were at the top now. Stone walls, three feet or more thick, shut in this little space, pierced high up by four open windows. The bell swung there. Its rope trailed down beside

them on the floor. He intended that they should get up to the windowsills and sit.

"If I lift you up on this frame—can you make it from there?" he asked.

"Oh, yes—easy." She spoke in a little breathless voice. Breathlessly, too, he lifted her without a word to the little board framework that leaned against the western wall. She had found a place in one shadowed side of the big window by the time he pulled himself up after her.

From the belfry they could see the beach with its fire; they even fancied they could hear the voices down there, all mingled with the noise of the surf. Lynnie tucked herself in to the shadow of the wall.

"They couldn't see us here," she whispered, "even if they came right up to the church."

But strangely, now that he had her away from all the others, Julian's mind was not yet at rest concerning Tony De Vega.

"What did you mean by saying that he'd be ashamed of himself?" came the first query. "Don't you think he wanted to marry you?"

"Oh, I suppose he did." Lynnie was mild about it. "He—well, he's a widower, you know. He's got two of the sweetest little children—a boy and a girl. His mother's taking care of them, but she's old and doesn't want to be bothered with them."

That was all she said. Julian fixed on one word for offence; it seemed intolerable that she should call anything concerning Tony De Vega "sweet." Two children—Tony had the impudence to be in love with her—that was it. He was in love. Men didn't fight and howl because they wanted somebody to take care of their little children.

"What makes us talk about it?" Lynnie's gentle evasion provoked Julian to demand,

"Did—do you like him?"

"I don't dislike Tony—when he's sober."

Nothing in that to make any one angry; yet hot anger surged in Julian. Yes, it must be anger.

"I believe you liked—the way he acted the other night."

"No, I didn't."

"Yes, you did."

"Oh, Julian!"

"Well, promise me if ever— I want you to promise me—" They had been leaning, each in a shelter of shadow, in opposite sides of the window. As Julian's voice failed him he reached across and caught hold of her. They drew together.

"I want you to promise—" His lips were hunting for the white curve of her throat. "Never anybody but me," he murmured, and broke off.

"Never anybody but you," he got the whispered answer, as he held her there. He kissed her throat . . . and then it was her own lips that met his.

In the swimming rapture of the moment Julian felt Lynnie stir. She seemed to pull away from him. He held her the tighter.

"Somebody's coming. They'll see us," she breathed against his cheek.

He lifted his head and listened. Crunch, crunch, went steps on the gravel below, turning in at the little side entry. Silence. Then the sound of some one coming out on the path again, going away.

"Hunting for the key," was Julian's guess. "Good thing we locked the door on the inside."

Held close in his arm, Lynnie looked and listened too. In the white moonlight, plain as day, came first one little dark figure and then another up over the bluff by the twisted path. Finally a man's shape with something queer over his shoulder; Lemaire and his camera.

"What do you suppose he's going to do with that—at night?" Lynnie wondered.

"Photograph the Mission by moonlight. I forgot all about it."

Silently Julian drew back into his corner of shadow; but as he went he brought the girl with him in his arms; he pulled her over on his lap, so that they could be quite out of sight from those below. He pressed her face in against his neck, murmuring,

"The door's locked. They couldn't possibly see us here."

She lay, a warm little burden, upon his breast, fulfilment of something in his life that, till now, had ached emptily; never any flesh against his flesh like the touch of Lynnie's cheek on his neck. As in a dream, he was aware of the stir and talk

below; there seemed to be an uneasiness among them down there.

"I wonder if— Do you suppose they've missed—us?" Lynnie breathed.

"I guess not," Julian reassured her; but even as he did so there came a scrambling sound on the further side of the tower, where an outside stair came part way up. Someone was climbing that. There was a ledge after the steps broke down. An active boy going head over head might get up far enough to look in by that way; Julian himself had done it in past years. As they stared, fascinated, at the square of moonlight which was the window in this wall, a head suddenly popped into it. Lynnie made an instinctive movement.

"Hello, kids," whispered Rose Daggett's voice. "Miss Dale and old Jordan sent me after the key. When I couldn't find it, it was a cinch you'd beat me to it."

There was not time to answer. For there were sounds of steps on the gravel below—more people than one now. They dared not look out to see who it was, but they heard Mrs. Jordan speak,

"Huh! It must be up at Pacheco's. It mostly hangs here on the nail."

"Where did Rose go?" There was concern in Dale Pollard's voice. "I'm afraid I do wrong to have her here with the others. Mrs. Willis—Lynnie's mother, you know—didn't like it. Said she'd never let Lynnie be with Rose at all. If she'd spoken sooner, I'd have left that girl out. Keep a careful eye on her, won't you?"

"Well, what d'ye know about that!" Rose muttered in the dark. The noise of the surf, the voices of the people out by the camera masked her speech. But she tittered when the Jordan woman's comment came to them good and loud:

"Oh, Rose ain't no different from the others. You know about her. That's all. These sort of girls are pretty much of a muchness. Some's bold and some's sly. I take 'em as they come. But they don't put anything over on me. I'll keep things straight whilst I'm in charge at 'Restlands,' Miss Pollard. Got your breath?"

"Yes."

"Then we'll go on up to Pacheco's and ask about that key."

They went on.

"What you going to do?" Rose asked, entirely unabashed.

Julian jumped down to the floor of the belfry, reckless of the noise he made, and lifted Lynnie after him. They could hear Rose's descent to the ground outside. "Come on," he said through his shut teeth.

"What are you going to do?" Lynnie anxiously repeated the other girl's question.

"Get down from here, first," rattling noisily from step to step. "Those women— I'm not going to sneak or hide any more." They were at the door. He put the key in its lock as he spoke. Lynnie caught his arm and burst out crying.

"Oh, don't—don't!"

He turned in astonishment, the door unlocked, the knob in hand.

"If you go out there and say—" Sobs broke that off. "—make me go right home—" she began in the middle of another protest. And then returned to, "Oh, don't, Julian—please don't!"

He was angry and reckless. Lynnie crying that way made him feel himself a brute.

"It's on your account I'd rather be open and aboveboard," he said at last. "But if you don't want me to——"

He was holding the door uncertainly as he spoke. There came a pressure against it, and Rose Daggett pushed in beside them. She peered curiously from one to the other as they stood there a moment, then said in a hushed tone:

"They've gone—old Jordan and Miss Dale. Now's your time to step out and pretend you've been here all the while. I'll find the key—it had dropped off the nail, y' know."

"You'll do that, won't you, Julian?" There was still a catch in Lynnie's voice.

"Yes—yes—I will; of course, I'll do exactly as you say. But —I've got to see you sometimes—not the way it's been to-night. I can't stand this."

He paid no attention to Rose standing by listening. She seemed to take not the slightest offence, but came in with that hoarse whisper of hers:

"Say—what's to hinder you kids from going over to San Pablo —any night you want to? Jule's got a machine. I know a sol-

dier at the Presidio. . . . If we could get word to him, the four of us . . ."

"Will you go over to San Pablo with me in the machine—to-morrow night?" Julian instantly asked Lynnie.

"I would if I could, Julian," she faltered. "Oh, I just can't bear to go against you!"

"Aw, rats!" scoffed Rose. "What's the matter with fixing up a story to fool old Jordan? Thinks she's so durn' smart—tellin' what kind of a girl I am. I'll show her what kind I am before I'm done with her."

"I don't know what we could say." Lynnie was still wiping her eyes and getting her breath with difficulty. Julian looked at her in the dimness. His heart ached over her. It was Lynnie and himself against the world. Nobody understood. They had a right to deceive in any way possible. He was ready to make use of Rose, if she could help them.

"What kind of a story do you mean, Rose?" he asked her.

"Oh—matron'll stand for 'most anything if it's got 'ruspectable marriage' in it," Rose tittered. "She let Lynn put it all over her about that Portugee mash. I heard her 'phonin' to Miss Dale at the Pollard ranch about him, when he brought Lynn's coat, you know, and asked old Jordan whose permission he had to git for him and her to marry."

Julian was staggered.

"You didn't tell me, Lynnie." His voice was accusing.

"I was afraid—you'd be mad." Her shaking fingers touched his arm. "You *are* mad. Oh—Julian!" She stood on tiptoe to look up into his face. "Julian, dear," she whispered feverishly. "I'll find some way to go with you. Rosy'll help me. I'll find some way."

"To-morrow night?"

"Aw—not Sunday," put in Rose. "Nothin' doin' in town on Sunday."

"Day after to-morrow, then."

"Well—maybe." Lynnie's voice was yet choked as she said it. "But Monday's a bad day for me—with washing, and all."

Washing! He was a brute. But somehow he couldn't let up.

"Set your own time," he said half sulkily. "But come."

"Tell him you'll do the best you can," Rose's hissing whisper prompted. "I'll help you, but for the love of Mike let's beat

it out of this before we're caught with the goods on us. Jule—get down to the fire and say you lost somethin' in the sand and went hunting for it. Gimme the key. Lynn and I'll chase around and come in from the other side."

CHAPTER VII

THE TRYST AT SAN PABLO

JULIAN stood at the corner of Alviso and Sixth, waiting for Lynnie. The usual Saturday night crowd was on the street. He had got a good position near the doorway of the San Pablo House where he could see, and didn't need to be seen himself. So far, Mr. Hannon in his Ford, going home, none of the family with him, was the only person he knew who had passed. He watched the bob-tail street-car lumber past; Spanish women doing the last of their Sunday buying; Chinamen, trim little Japs; soldiers from the Presidio; townspeople; occasionally a handsome auto with Liveoak guests.

Then, far down the block he caught sight of the Bruckner team, Dill driving, Alma's father beside him. Julian stepped further out to look; yes, there was Alma Bruckner on the back seat, and beyond her—Lynnie.

They came on; they were almost opposite when he realised that Lynnie was guardedly shaking her head at him, and drew back again out of sight. Dill pulled up on the other side of the street; the two girls got out and crossed over, passing the San Pablo House, going on up Sixth.

He hadn't long to wait after that before Lynnie came back. He met her there on Sixth where there wasn't much light. She came walking fast, all in a flutter, with shining eyes and scarlet parted lips. There was some kind of a thin white thing twisted around her hair. He remembered she had told him it was an old auto veil Miss Dale Pollard gave her.

"How did you get along? Have lots of trouble?" and then, before she could answer, "In here," guiding her toward the Sixth Street entrance of the hotel. "Upstairs. I've ordered our dinner. Dining-room doesn't close till quarter of nine. If you'd been later than that we were going down to the grill."

He took her through the office. She didn't speak while they

were in there, with the clerk behind the desk noticing them, men sitting about with newspapers, looking over the tops. When they were on the stairs,

"Rose helped me, like she said she would." Lynnie put the question of trouble aside as of no importance. "She knows where I am. If it hadn't been for her, I shouldn't have dared stir, with all those girls in the house."

"The other girls?"

"You never can tell which one is watching you and will go to Mrs. Jordan with a story," Lynnie said mildly. "Anyhow, Mrs. Jordan's got her hands full now with Lena Federmann. Lena has fits, you know. She's had an awfully bad spell—now she's sort of crazy—has to be watched all the time."

When they were settled at their table and the waiter had gone for their soup, Julian leaned forward and spoke low,

"Why wouldn't you let me come and help you out of the wagon there on Alviso Street? Aren't the Bruckners to know you're with me?"

"Oh, Julian—of course not! Mrs. Jordan let me come into town with them. She thinks Alma and I are going to Alma's grandmother's; but—of course not."

"What does Alma think about it?"

"Well, I had to tell her that I wanted to have dinner and go to the movies with—with company. And I said my friends—would take me home after the show. But I wouldn't bring you into it—even with Alma."

"She'll see us together in town." Julian took a look at the idea and found he liked it; Alma was a pretty good sort—and engaged to Thatch. But Lynnie shook her head.

"No. We mustn't go out on the street till time for the Bruckners to be done their marketing and on the way home. We really mustn't, Julian."

"Oh—if you say so," Julian agreed reluctantly. He wanted to feel again as he had at the Portuguese dance—there when he finally broke out and claimed Lynnie before them all. He was a little ashamed of the Julian who hadn't punched Tony De Vega's head. If they met the fellow in town to-night—he'd show him pretty quick where to get off. Yes, to-night he was rather looking for war; something heady and strong seemed to have got into him. He felt like being very good to Lynnie—

a kind of foolish wish to have her take his arm. He'd like to be sure that he showed everybody they belonged together.

When he and Lynnie finished dinner they went through the office, and she asked him to leave her there and take a look up and down the sidewalk before they ventured out. As he came back from reconnoitring he caught some last words—the clerk had just asked Lynnie if she wanted to register—for a room. Her cheeks were fiery. He felt his own hot. He could only look at her that way for a minute; the next they were getting through the doors to the street. That was when she took his arm.

San Pablo about nine o'clock of a Saturday night, its corner saloons giving out cheerful sounds and odours of stale beer, soldiers strolling the sidewalks, soldiers who looked at Lynnie with such bold admiration. Julian was beginning to get his breath after that occurrence there in the hotel office. The town was theirs. Why, they might have been there, together, any night, like this! There was no reason they shouldn't be.

"Nobody we know here," he kept saying to Lynnie. "Nobody that knows us."

"No—I don't see any one," she murmured.

"We'll just about be in time for the second run at either of these movie places," he suggested.

"We might go in now, and we'd get a little of the first run," Lynnie answered quickly.

He liked that. It sounded as if she didn't want to miss anything. But there was nothing Lynnie could say or do that he didn't like—that he wouldn't have liked—to-night. He couldn't keep his eyes from her. He kept looking down at her and thinking how wonderful it was she should just suit him so exactly that way, and he should have found her.

"The Crescent," up on a side street, was offering a thing Julian had seen and did not care for. They went down to the other.

At last they were sitting side by side in the dark, hardly conscious of the other people about them, or of the pictures flashed on the screen. They were at a show together, away from "Restlands." Then Julian, wanting to whisper something, reached over and took her hand—so as to be sure she heard him. Thereafter the two hands, lightly clasped, lay between them, till the lights flared up, and the first-run people poured out, fewer com-

ing in for the second. Again the screen was darkened; again the operator began to run the program through: a slap-stick comedy, a travelogue or educational feature; then the five-reel thriller.

They had chanced on the sort of drama that all good motion picture men are striving to put out of the field. The producer, throughout, was evidently trying to make up for his lack of skill and artistry by what he would have called "daring." Julian sat there, Lynnie by his side in the dark, and looked on as the young actress who played the heroine—a little, slim, schoolgirl thing, she seemed hardly older than Lynnie herself—was followed, beset, rudely attacked, wrestled with by the villain—and came shockingly near being overcome. It was persecuted virtue, finally triumphant; yet somehow the emotions it roused were not those that would have seemed appropriate.

He didn't take Lynnie's hand again; he felt so intensely self-conscious. He was aware of a change, momentary but powerful, in his own attitude toward her. When they came out, following along with the crowd, he was silent, not finding the right word, hardly daring to look at her. Finally, when he did speak, he was a little surprised to hear himself saying,

"Well—we'd have to go down to the garage for the machine—if we're going home to-night at all." He ended on a hushed note and waited for her answer.

"Yes," she said. Back there in the theatre, he had guessed an emotion equal to his own. Now she seemed to look around and breathe more freely. "I'm glad I told Mrs. Jordan I'd 'phone her if Alma got delayed or anything. What time is it?"

He glanced at his watch and whistled.

"I didn't know it was so late." He began to feel more like himself, more responsible and reasonable. "Oh, well, the Go-devil can make it in half an hour—if we speed."

"Will that get us there by half-past eleven?"

"I think so."

They turned into the side street, and went on to the garage where Julian had left his car. There stood the Go-devil. But, as they came up, the young fellow on night duty got between them and it.

"Say," he began, "I'm awful sorry, but——"

"What's the matter?" Julian interrupted, looking past him at the roadster.

"Why—you see—a man drove into your machine——"

"Break anything?"

"Busted a hole in the radiator—and that's a fact," the young fellow admitted.

"Have you fixed it? No? How long will it take, then? We haven't got any time to spare."

"Why, I couldn't do it—all alone. Can't be repaired till to-morrow morning. 'Course we're responsible. We'll fix it then and not charge you a cent—but——"

"It's got to be done to-night." Julian pushed him aside and looked at the ragged hole stove in the Go-devil's radiator.

"Got far to go?"

"About twenty miles. You'll have to let me have another machine."

"Well—that's just it," the boy at his elbow seemed very much upset. "There ain't a thing in the garage I could give you. The boss is out of town. I rang up his house as soon as it happened. But he's gone somewheres. I couldn't get any answer. Then I rang up our head mechanic—and couldn't get him. His wife said he was out at the movies, she thought. Say, if you folks wouldn't mind staying over, we'd pay your hotel bill."

Julian made no answer. He bent as though inspecting critically the damage to the Go-devil. He was acutely conscious of what had been said—of Lynnie standing nervously by, hearing it. The garage boy appealed to her.

"You ain't just got to be home to-night, have you? Couldn't you 'phone your folks—and stay over?"

Lynnie made no answer. Julian straightened up finally, saying,

"It would take two hours to fix that, anyhow."

"They'll go right at it first thing in the morning," the boy assured him. "The repairs won't cost you a cent—nor staying over." The telephone rang. "I'll bet that's Bob now. The show's out, he's got home, and his wife's told him about you, and he's ringing up to see how we fixed it. Excuse me a minute while I answer him."

He went and left the two standing by the injured machine.

"You said you were going to 'phone Mrs. Jordan if you got

delayed or anything," Julian began haltingly. "Why couldn't we just tell her that—that Alma missed you some way getting back, and—well, we could say—I don't know where we'll tell her you were staying."

They stood in the door facing the street. Lynnie looked up and down it a minute; then spoke in the same odd, hushed tone,

"Alma's grandmother lives up there at the head of Sixth. That's where I went with Alma when we first got in town this evening. I could tell Mrs. Jordan I was staying there to-night. I suppose I really could go there—but it's pretty late, and——"

"All right—Alma's grandmother's—that's what we'll say." Julian stopped her hastily. The boy was getting back.

"It was the boss instead of Bob," he explained. "Boss says for you to go to the San Pablo House, and send him the bill. It won't cost you a cent, and it won't cost him a cent. He'll make Peters pay. To tell the truth, Peters was pretty well lit up; both circuits on, or he never would have run into your machine. Come blame near taking a leg off o' me, darn him! Want to use the 'phone to let your folks know?"

"No, thank you," said Julian.

They stepped out onto the sidewalk together. Now Lynnie clung to his arm indeed—and there was no need to ask why. A late moon was up; the streets of San Pablo stretched under it, white and vacant. They passed more than one auto waiting at the curb with the sign, "For Hire." The second said, "Carry you anywhere for a dollar." But no mention was made of getting home in this way. Not a word passed between them till they were at the drugstore on the corner across from the San Pablo House; then Julian stopped.

"Better 'phone from in here."

They went in. There was no need for long distance; the valley telephones were all on the San Pablo exchange. Julian stood by and heard Lynnie get Mrs. Jordan and make her statements. Then,

"Yes. In the morning. Just as soon as I can." A little pause, and, "Oh—on the stage—yes. Of course I'll come on the stage—that's the only way I could come—now."

She listened long, then covered the mouthpiece with her hand, looking around at him with large frightened eyes.

"She wants me to go and see the doctor at the hospital, and

ask him if they can take Lena there, and how soon. She says she's been trying to get him—and can't. What shall I tell her?"

"Say you'll go. Find out where it is, and we'll go now."

"Mrs. Jordan," Lynnie uncovered the 'phone, spoke into it, and then listened. "Oh, no, ma'am," with a little catch of the breath. "Alma's grandmother hasn't got any 'phone. We're at a drug-store 'phoning. Listen, Mrs. Jordan: I'll go and see the hospital man, right now. Maybe if he rings you up he can get you. Maybe if his 'phone is out of order he'll go to another one and ring you up. Anyhow, I'll do the best I can. I will. No, ma'am, I won't miss the stage. Yes, ma'am, I know it starts at five o'clock. I won't miss it."

"I was afraid she'd ask you to have some of the people you were staying with come to the 'phone," Julian said, when Lynnie joined him tremblingly.

"I was afraid of that, too, for a minute. But they haven't got any 'phone in the house; and anyhow she didn't. The hospital address is seventy-six Castro Street. Shall we go there now?"

"Yes. Now."

All the way along the street, up the hill toward Castro, Lynnie talked a little sometimes, but Julian never said a word. He couldn't. Waiting outside at the hospital while she went in and saw the doctor, he felt like a helpless stick of driftwood driven round and round in a whirlpool. There she came, down the steps. She was running toward him. Her hand was on his arm. She was saying,

"They'll take Lena. One of his 'phones was out of order. He'll let Mrs. Jordan know by the other. I was glad he couldn't ring her up while I was there—somehow. She's not to bring Lena till next Sunday. It's kind of charity, you know."

"Yes," said Julian. "Yes."

They started down the hill. It was only at her, "Not quite so fast, Julian," that he noticed how she was almost running to keep up with him. Why, he was hurrying her off her feet! The catching breath he had heard—that was the reason of it.

The din and confusion in his own mind never slackened. He believed she *was* crying. He stopped, there in the dark, steep little street, took her by the shoulders and turned her to the

light that came from an electric far down the way. Such a look in her face! Her eyes didn't dread or reproach him. . . . If they only had! She trusted him utterly.

"Lynnie—Lynnie," he begged. He'd got to answer that trust in her eyes with something decent—something manly. What if he offered to take her up to that woman's house—Alma Bruckner's grandmother? He didn't know he had spoken till he found her clinging to him, crying,

"So late at night—what would they think?"

"Well," huskily, "I can take you back to 'Restlands.' In a hired auto. I could have taken you that way all the time. I should have done it."

'We can't—we can't!" And now she sobbed outright. "Julian, don't you see we can't do that? I've already told Mrs. Jordan I'm not coming to-night. What would I say to her?"

"I'm to blame for this."

Holding Lynnie in his arm, Julian looked about at the empty, midnight street, then down at the small, dimly seen face on his breast. Her eyes were closed, tears were on her cheeks.

"Don't—oh, don't cry, Lynnie! It—it'll be all right."

That was all he could say; he took out his handkerchief and wiped away her tears. They began walking forward. Before he had arrived at any clear thought or idea, they were at the lighted side entrance of the San Pablo House. She turned in the doorway and looked at him uncertainly. Alviso Street was bright and empty except for some men who had just come out of the corner saloon, a hundred yards away. Did she expect him to leave her? Did he intend to do so? He found himself in the hotel office confronting the register, with no decision made.

"Hello—going to stay with us, after all," the clerk welcomed them, presenting a dipped pen. In a sort of fog, Julian put his name down. Then suddenly everything cleared.

"Yes," he said, in a commonplace voice. "They smashed my roadster round at the garage. We can't get it till to-morrow." And he wrote with a steady hand, below his own name, "and sister"!

The clerk pulled the volume around into its usual place.

"You're Stephen McCulloch's son, ain't you?" he smiled. "Your father used to stop with us sometimes. Then to the Jap, as he handed him the two keys, "Nineteen and seventeen, Aoki.

Mr. McCulloch, I'm putting you and your sister on the ground floor. Is that all right?"

Julian just nodded, as they turned away to follow the Japanese pattering along the hall ahead of them, keys in hand.

Why should that mention of his father have changed everything for Julian? Why should it have carried him instantly back to the scene when he was seven—too young to understand it then? But since, he had brought such knowledge as he had—little enough—to bear on it; he had realised his mother's jealousy, and that his father was "that kind of a man." Well—what kind of a man was he—Julian? What was this he was about? He had been very brave defending Lynnie from Tony De Vega and his likes. What about defending her from Julian McCulloch? There was no time to argue the question. The door of the first room was being opened.

Lynnie went in and stood uncertainly in the middle of it. The Jap passed through the connecting door into the other room. Julian, following, noted the usual manœuvres that suggest a tip, handed out the coin, and waited, standing with his back to Lynnie, till the bandy-legged little man bustled away. Then he whirled as though he had been taken by the shoulders and turned around. At sight of the look in her face, he went toward her, muttering hoarsely,

"Lynnie—Lynnie—don't be scared. It's only Julian. It's me. I'll take care of you." Trying to comfort her, to reassure her, the tall fellow who shook from head to foot, whose breath caught in his throat, silencing speech, who needed comfort and reassurance worse than she.

"I'm not scared—of you," she whispered against his cheek.

A moment he held her so, while the world swam away. Then, struggling against the engulfing tide, he put her from him resolutely, choking out without looking at her,

"Lock the door—after me. Lock me out. Good-night."

He found the way into his own room, somehow, her whispered "Good-night" following him plaintively.

He staggered over to a chair by the window, without seeing it. He had done the right thing—if the right thing could be done after keeping Lynnie in town this way. He had done the right thing. Was there anything right? Was there anything wrong?

He put his head down on the windowsill and sat there motionless. The chiming of those two bells—is anything right?—is anything wrong?—loud in his ears. They kept him company till morning.

CHAPTER VIII

A STOLEN DAY

THE down-the-coast stage from San Pablo left very early. There was no trouble about being awake for it. Shortly after daylight Julian had been to the office to tell the porter to warn him when the stage was ready, and come back to prowl in the corridor, wretched, looking at her door, not knowing whether he should go and tap on it.

Then all at once it opened—and there she stood. For a moment he just stared at her, and couldn't speak, seeing how white her little pointed face was, how big and dark and piteous were the grey eyes in it. His fault. His doings. Keeping her in town all night this way, having her run such an awful risk—for what? He was trying to say something, when the porter came down the hall and warned them that the stage was waiting and they'd be left if they didn't hurry.

Then out in front of the hotel on the sidewalk, where he found a high, weeping fog, almost like rain, making everything chill and clammy, he remembered too late that he ought to have been careful not to let the driver see him. This man was a link with Siloam Valley. He didn't seem to be paying much attention. He called something about there being no other passengers and went on into the post-office next door to get his mail sacks. Julian took that moment to help his poor little girl to her seat.

The flat top gave slight protection. They hadn't put the curtains up—because it was "only fog." But the horses looked miserable with it; harness and vehicle gleamed wet. He was sick with remorse to remember that the stage would only take her to the corner above "Restlands." Such a long way to walk—nothing but white slippers to walk it in—the thought gave him an acute, physical pang. He felt helpless—contemptible. And she hadn't had any breakfast!

"You'll never want to see my face again," he whispered to her tragically.

What a strange, mysterious little smile there was on her lips as she reached down from the vehicle, patted his shoulder, and breathed,

"O-oooh, Julian—the idea!"

After she was gone he walked about till it was time for a breakfast which almost choked him, then paid his bill and went round to the garage to get his machine. Every public auto he passed on the street taunted him with having kept poor Lynnie in San Pablo—when he might as well have taken her back to "Restlands," in safety. Suppose it were found out—what would happen?

The machine stood ready. He got in it and started home. The fog was still thick, the windshield so dim with moisture that he had to lean around it to see ahead. His coat trembled with little drops like dew. He was suddenly struck with the thought, why hadn't he made Lynnie take that sweater of his? Boob! Cheap skate!

Sometimes the fog drove like fine rain, sometimes floated in smoky grey wreaths. At ten o'clock, when he was passing "Restlands," it was so thick that he couldn't see the buildings. He had gotten almost by when a girl dodged out of the misty chaparral by the way, and, when he slowed down, jumped on the running-board and laughed up into his face. It was Rose Daggett.

He looked his question. She answered in words,

"Lynn made it, all right."

For a moment that was the only thing he paid any attention to; then he found she was speaking still,

"D'ye know Jordan's going to take Lena over to the sanitarium Sunday?"

"Yes. We made the arrangement for her."

"Well?"

"Well?" Julian echoed.

"What's the matter with you? Don't you see that the rest of us'll have a free day then—if we've got sense enough to take it? She says she can't be home before ten o'clock Sunday night. You be along here early Sunday morning—and you'll find Lynnie. I'll fix it."

"Have you said anything to her? Does she know about it? Will she go?"

"Aw, come off! Will a fish swim? You be here on time; that's all you got to do," she jeered, as she dropped from the running-board.

Julian drove ahead; the sense of relief was almost painful. A whole day with Lynnie—and so soon! She'd go with him. She must have said so.

He got to the ranch and found a damp rag of a note pinned to his tent curtains in old Ben's straggling script: "Thought I'd let you sleep. Gone in my High Powered Ford over to Slosson's. Breakfast in the Pullman, covered from the cats." So the old man had not missed him—had never known he was gone. No explanations would be needed.

His mind was full of plans for the long outing with Lynnie. He'd like to make it something awfully nice—awfully well worth while. It was hard to do, when they didn't dare be seen together. That cut them out of San Pablo, of course. Liveoak, the Forest Lodge? Impossible. Old Bitter? No, there wasn't much to that for an all-day camp. It was not till he was dropping off to sleep that night that there came before his eyes, just like a picture, memory of a strange little place about eighteen miles down the coast, called Smuggler's Cove, where he and Thatch Dye had gone once, years ago; Thatch had been blamed for taking him, on account of the danger of getting down to the place. It was near the road, but nobody could get to it from the landward side, except by climbing down steep cliffs or being lowered by a rope. No boats passed close, on that rocky bit of coast. There were always stories of Chinamen and opium being smuggled in by that landing. It gave the place a mysterious terror, that kept people away from it. He knew just how he would cut some footholds in the rotten limestone of the cliff (not too good, or he'd have other people trying them) so that he could get down himself to fix up the place. When it came to Lynnie, he'd lower her with a rope. It was at Smuggler's Cove that he and Lynnie would spend their stolen day.

Sunday morning was so fine that Julian began to be afraid they might not have set the hour of meeting early enough to get off unobserved. However, he had got almost to "Restlands" without meeting any one, when a mounted soldier turned in from

the Liveoak shortcut, and went trotting on ahead. He slowed to let the man get on and out of the way. There were two girls on the high bank across from the "Restlands" lane. Heavens! Was it possible that Rose expected to go with him and Lynnie? Then, in the instant of doubting, his soldier, who had put on a spurt of speed and got well ahead, pulled up beside the bank, Rose set her foot on his, sprang on behind him, and they trotted away.

With a touch on the accelerator Julian brought the Go-devil up opposite Lynnie. He looked at her. She just stood there on the high bank and looked at him. He jumped out of his machine and ran to her. Some one might come past any moment and see them; he'd intended not to say a word like asking her to forgive him for that night at San Pablo till they were safely out of the valley, but he couldn't help it, he put his arms around her waist. Where she stood she was so much above him that it brought his head on a level with her breast. He pressed it in against her, the face raised.

"Oh, Lynnie," he said, and then in a lower tone, "God bless you!"

It was not at all the way he had thought they would meet. Something stronger than himself seemed to have hold of him. He felt so moved—so broken up inside that he could have wept, or shouted for joy. As he helped her over to his machine, the first wagonload for early mass at the Mission passed and stared at them curiously. Just Portuguese from the upper end of the valley; it didn't matter; he looked down at her little dusty shoes and said, softly,

"I haven't thought of anything else all week, but you having to walk so far—in your white slippers with their high heels—and dancing slippers."

"But I didn't spoil them a bit." She settled down in her seat and they were off. "Sand doesn't stain, you know. I brushed them and——"

"Sand—it was all soaked through; you might as well have been out in the rain."

"Why, it was just fog."

"I'll get you a new pair—better than those."

"Please don't. Honestly, Julian, they're just like new. You mustn't."

He promised finally.

"Where are we going?" she questioned eagerly, and he told her,

"Smuggler's Cove."

"Well, it's all right—for the whole day," she said jubilantly. "Mrs. Jordan's gone with Lena—went last night. They've sent five of the girls back to San Vicente. The three that were left had a chance to visit some folks they know at a ranch. Rose and I are supposed to be keeping house."

"You will be," Julian tried to joke a bit, though he found his voice still shaky. Who but Lynnie would be taking it like this? "Down in Smuggler's Cove."

"Is there a house there?"

"Wait till you see. I'm not going to tell you anything more. I've made three trips down there; I don't believe I've forgotten anything."

For a little while they drove in silence. It was all right between them. Lynnie had done better than forgive him—she seemed never to have thought there was any offence. But he couldn't quite give up wanting her to know how badly he had felt about it. He stole a look at her and said,

"Lynnie, I worry about you—or think about you—all the time."

"I do you, too," she answered, very low.

"And you know what I've been thinking all this week?"

"No—what?"

"Expecting you to change your mind. I shouldn't have been surprised if you'd—well, if you'd sent me word that you wouldn't go with me to-day."

He was conscious of not exactly meaning it as he said it. He knew that it was a lure for the answer it got.

"Why, Julian, I'd never do it. You know I'd never send you any word like that."

Strange and wonderful how different the world looked. It wasn't the change from the weeping fog of Friday morning to this blue and gold sunshine; Lynnie's little face that had been so pale and pinched then was rippling with innocent smiles.

In spite of a rough road Julian let the Go-devil out and ran fast; they couldn't risk meeting some one who knew them.

Opposite the Cove, Julian lifted Lynnie down quickly, tossed

out their things, and hurried to hide the car in tall chaparral. He had never seen Lynnie so gay. She laughed and joked him when he put the long rope around her waist to lower her; she kept reassuring him where he stood paying it out cautiously as she climbed down. Finally her little feet struck the sand, she looked up at him and laughed again as she untied the rope.

"I'm all right now," she said. It was a commonplace little phrase, but it seemed to him the sweetest thing he had ever heard. And when she added, "Did you think I was going to fall?" it brought a choke in his throat.

There were some things to be lowered to her, and taken off. Finally he climbed down himself. Their day was before them. At last they stood safely together in that little lonely spot; just a bit of shelving white beach cut off from the rest of the world by the tall cliffs that tilted outward at their tops, so that any one above there could scarcely lean far enough over to find you if you chose to hide. Before them was the empty, blue ocean; above, the empty, blue sky.

Now was his time. Back there in the valley, at the cross-roads where they met, some one might have come past. Driving down, it was the same thing. But all the time he was getting their camp in the Cove ready, cutting the steps, fixing up the little stone cooking place, he had promised himself vehemently that the first moment they were here, safe from interruption, he would tell her that he thought he'd behaved like a brute—a fool —a cheap skate, Thursday night. He would ask her in so many words to forgive him. He would make his peace.

He looked at her where she knelt over by the fireplace, fairly talking to it in her delight, standing again to get out a checked gingham apron she had brought along; backing vaguely toward him with an absent little,

"Button it, please."

He buttoned it, while she gazed about her, repeating, over and over,

"It is like a house, almost. Get the fire made right away, Julian. I know you want your breakfast. Men are always cross till they've had breakfast."

How could you make peace with Lynnie? She was peace. Julian gave it up and went about his fire building.

Breakfast: Coffee, toast, bacon, eggs. After it Lynnie must clear up.

"No. Let me," Julian said.

"Let you? You don't know how."

"You show me, then."

"No. I don't even want you to help. Just lie down over there till I get done the dishes, and everything put away, then I'll come and sit by you and we'll talk."

But they talked while Lynnie was still at work. She had begun to take care of him. She looked uneasy as he rolled up his overcoat for a pillow, and finally said rather diffidently,

"Ought you to do that, Julian? Why not take one of the cushions? You'll spoil your coat."

"I guess not," easily. "Tailor said when he was making that coat for me it would stand anything. That's what it's supposed to be for."

"Did a tailor make it? Oh—! I didn't know tailors made overcoats; I thought you always bought them ready-made."

"Why, of course you can. Some people do. A man in San Francisco makes all my things now. I used to have them from the San Vicente tailors—Dolson & Otte, down on San Sebastian Street—you know, don't you?" Lynnie nodded.

"My uncle," she began seriously, "mother's youngest brother, Lemuel, that went back to Lynn, Massachusetts, had a suit made by a tailor once. When he put it on he was awfully mad, and swore. It didn't fit. I guess the man wasn't a very good tailor. He lived down on the corner beyond our house. He owed Uncle Lem some money—that's the way he came to get him to make the suit."

Julian went back into the big cave where the tidewater flowed and brought out fresh mussels for the noon meal. It was when she was getting these on to steam that Lynnie drew back suddenly and shook a coal off her skirt, regarding the spot it had charred in dismay. Julian ran to her.

"Burn yourself?" he asked in quick anxiety. "You ought to let me do all this."

"No, it didn't burn me. I'd rather it had. I'm afraid it's made a hole in my skirt. Yes—that's going to come through," trying the charred threads a bit.

"Let me see it," he knelt and took the blue serge hem between

AFTER A WHILE LYNNIE BEGAN TO PASS HER LITTLE HAND OVER HIS HAIR. "DOES THAT BOTHER YOU?" SHE ASKED TIMIDLY

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his fingers. There was a patch near the scorched place, a darn on the other side; the whole, cheap, sleazy thing was faded and threadbare.

"I guess I can mend it," Lynnie debated. "It's getting too short for me, anyhow."

"Then why should you mend it?" Julian looked up at her to ask.

"Because, it's got to be made over for Phyllis, when I can't wear it any more." Lynnie quit discussions to get the mussels on, but when they were in place she sat down to watch them, took her knees into a contented embrace and went on: "Don't you know things have got to be made over—in a family like ours? This was fixed out of one of Mommie's. Most of our clothes are made over two or three times. You know"—smiling at his blank look—"ripped apart, and washed, and pressed out, and then cut down and sewed over. I don't mind it."

At noon when they were eating their lunch the sun stood straight above, warming the sands. Then came the long, wonderful solitary afternoon. The ocean was bare and blue. They counted four ships that passed far out, on the edge of the horizon; a tiny smudge of smoke for a steamer; a little upright bunch of sticks for a schooner. They talked. The quiet, the warmth, the solitude, the slap of the waves, the drone and whisper of the surf, and Lynnie's voice, the touch of her hand—Julian found no place in this to even remember regret and penitence.

"It's as though we were cast away on a desert island together," he found himself saying, as he lay content near her where she sat watching the kettle that held their dinner.

"Yes, did you use to play that?"

"Of course. Up in the attic. But I hadn't anybody for a Man Friday."

"Oh, yes—the Man Friday. I can just remember playing Robinson Crusoe with Ollie. Ollie was killed when he was seven. I'm the oldest of the family." Her voice lapsed then, and she added one of those queer little sayings that seemed somehow to mean so much. "The oldest of a poor family."

"I'm the oldest and the youngest of our family," Julian said finally.

As the sun got low it was cooler in the cove. They were glad

to eat their dinner close by the fire—such a happy meal, with Lynnie having to be made to sit still and let him wait on her! The rock walls of the cove echoed the noise of the surf in a pleasant uproar; sounds from the road or the bank above could hardly have been heard; though once they had listened and run to cover when there was the snarl of an automobile horn. But few machines came down the coast. They had cleared away after their dinner, and packed. Their day was almost over—the wonderful day that he'd looked forward to and planned for all week. Julian stood beside Lynnie and looked down at the little stone fireplace when suddenly, right above them as it seemed, there sounded out a high, excited giggle, then a voice squeaked:

"I tell you there *are* people down there!" and another, enough like it to have been an echo said from further away:

"Oh—who do you suppose it is?"

At the first sound both Julian and Lynnie had sprung back to the shelter of the bank. The Hannon twins up there evidently hung over the edge till they almost lost their balance, for they sent down a shower of small rocks that fell perilously close to the hidden faces as the two stood flattened back in the shallow niche.

"Aw, come on away," called the second voice. "Might be smugglers."

"Well—suppose it was? They wouldn't do anything to us."

"They might—just the same. Dill Bruckner told— Say, that Chinaman that chased Ball and Bench Prentiss one time came up out of this place. They didn't see him come—but they knew he did."

"He couldn't have. There's no way to get up. My goodness—it does look as if somebody had been cutting sort of steps."

There was the thud of hoofs.

"Hi—Essie—look out! Our plugs are getting away!"

More rocks fell; then a sound of running feet.

"They've got the Bruckner horses," Lynnie said softly. "They often get them to ride, Sundays."

Julian nodded silently and started back toward the fire, but Lynnie, holding his wrist, cautioned:

"Don't you suppose they'll go a little piece down the road, and maybe come back—or anyhow hang around the place a while?"

"Of course they will?" he laughed; it was so exactly what might be expected of the Hannon twins. "We'll just fool 'em."

He pulled a rug and his overcoat into the shallow cavelike place, to make a nest for Lynnie, and when she was snugly settled in it so that the rock wall made a back for her seat, stretched out with his head in her lap. After a while she began to pass that little work-hardened hand of hers, feather light, over his hair.

"Does that bother you?" she asked timidly as he looked up, caught the fingers and pulled them around against his mouth to kiss them.

"I love it. Go ahead." He closed his eyes.

"I cure father's headaches by stroking sometimes," her voice went softly on. "Then, sometimes, he can't bear to have it touched." A long silence and then, "Father only has a headache if he's been drinking. Did I tell you that he drinks sometimes?"

"No."

"I had a mind to when you told me that about getting the beer and—and——"

"About my getting drunk," Julian supplied, smiling with his eyes closed.

"Mother's just devoted to father," solemnly, "even when he drinks. But she—but she—" Lynnie broke off, then concluded very low, "I wouldn't look at him that way if I was her—however much he'd had. I'd never look that way at anybody I loved."

Julian opened his eyes and looked up into her face in the cave's dusk. The gaze held hers, in a sudden masterful shock.

"Do you love me?" he asked.

"Of course," with a rush of colour on the delicate temples.

"That's not the way. Not 'of course.' Say it right."

"I love you."

It was said. It was out.

"Lynnie! Lynnie!" Julian turned and put both his arms around her. Holding her so, he knew what the poets mean when they say the floods clap their hands and the waters rejoice. He understood about the winds being hushed to listen to this utterance.

"Say it again," he demanded. In all his nineteen years those

words—just those three—had never been said to him before. The nearest thing to it that he could recall—and the memory of that came grotesquely back at this wonderful moment—was a small, long-legged girl at a children's party when he was a slightly longer-legged boy, shouting, "I'm stuck on you," and then diving red-faced into her mother's lap, refusing to look at him again. He remembered that it had had a great deal of weight with him, too, ridiculous as it now sounded. Looking back he was glad that no one had said to him just, "I love you," till Lynnie did. He had thought he wanted it; but now he knew that he only wanted it from her. He was jealous for her that she should be the only one.

This was the answer to it all—this the solution. He had silently prayed her to forgive him; he had bid for expression of that forgiveness by blaming himself. How foolish! All that was needed was to say, "I love you." His arms still close around her——

"Lynnie," he whispered, "it's forever and forever—for both of us—isn't it?"

. . . . . .

Julian went up first, the rope around his waist, and brought the roadster from its hiding place. The sunset had long since died out of the sky, the afterglow was a dim purple in the west. Blind man's holiday; you couldn't recognise any one six steps away. Of course the Hannon twins had been gone for hours. He sent the rope back for package after package, brought them up, stowed them on the roadster and finally Lynnie herself came.

He took her in his arms as though she were a treasure he had just recovered, carried her so across to the machine, put her in the seat and stood beside the roadster lifting his face to be kissed. He picked up her hand and looked at it—at his ring on it, with the seal turned in against the palm. He kissed that, too.

"I'll put it on a ribbon around my neck when I get to the house," she whispered—though there was nobody to overhear them. Finally she found strength to say:

"I expect we'd better be starting—dear. Mrs. Jordan might be earlier than she thought."

When the valley road was reached there came another bitter parting. How could he let her go? Why must she walk, anyhow?

"Oh, but we'll find some way—again," she whispered from a last embrace.

CHAPTER IX

SUMMER

JULIAN turned the car and drove slowly toward home. When he reached the gate, there was a light in the house, and he went on past. He'd wait till Uncle Ben was in bed and asleep. He didn't want to be talked to to-night; he hadn't a word to say to anybody; he didn't want to be reminded that there was another soul in the world just now but himself and Lynnie.

Up the valley; slowly at first, but quickening the speed as he went. On and on, around those high curves with the steep drop below, through thick-treed, cool hollows, and along open, level stretches—all the way to the dance-hall.

By the time he reached it the moon, though not yet risen, was beginning to make the eastern sky lighter, so that the mountains showed black against it. The place was very still and solitary; he left his machine at the back, as he had the night of the dance, went on through the scrub of willows to the river bank, found a log over a pool and sat down. He'd not noticed the hour; he had no idea how long he sat there, not exactly thinking, not planning, not looking forward—just fully, dreamily happy without thought. The waters down in the pool, the moon that finally climbed high enough in the heavens to look sweetly over the still tree-tops and find him sitting there—Siloam valley, the world, the universe—he seemed mysteriously at one with it all; and in that harmony was a great peace.

Hours of this, maybe. Going back to the roadster in the moonlight he half shut his eyes to make himself believe that Lynnie was waiting in the machine. When he came up close, it seemed almost as though she were there, as though he heard her breathe, could have reached forward and touched her as she nestled in the close, low seat. How plucky she'd been passing the porch the night of the dance, and that crazy fellow with his gun up there! But then, there was nobody else in the world like her—nobody.

Yes—and if it was known—if they were found out—she'd be taken away from him. That thought stopped him short. He stood there in the dark and fairly trembled to it. It seemed to him that, till now, he'd never known real fear. They had controlled him by wearying him out; they couldn't scare him. He would always have been ready to defy authority—if there had been anything worth it.

He got soberly into his machine, thinking hard.

He had found that which was worth any defiance; and defiance would do no good; it would only lose everything. Yes; it was himself and Lynnie against all their world. They couldn't tell the truth; they couldn't be open. It would have to be secret. He didn't mind that; he liked it. . . . Old Ben's words—"You don't have to tell everything you know—" At that, the deceits forced on them would be no more really dishonest than what an actor says and does to earn his daily bread.

The following week, Miss Dale Pollard had an unexpected donation of money and came down, twenty girls strong, for a week-end. This was Julian's chance. The other young people in the valley were tired of Miss Dale and her "Restlands" affairs. But Julian and his machine and his ability as a pianist were instantly and gracefully at Miss Pollard's disposal. Paula took this to herself, of course, and was in his way a good deal. It wasn't much he got out of it; a dance with Lynnie in a roomful of people there at "Restlands"; a snatched minute in an entry, or on the porch, Lynnie scared, begging him to be careful; Paula coming out and interrupting them.

One of the things Lynnie told Julian in the snatched moments between dances was how Mrs. Jordan had come home from San Pablo that Sunday night, boiling. She'd met Rose on the street there with her soldier, and Rose had laughed in her face, said she was done with "Restlands"—"given her lip." Yet, lacking any help, Julian and Lynnie did manage, one way and another, to be together a great deal. Lynnie, who went around when he was over there at "Restlands," hardly speaking above her breath, scarcely raising her eyes, answering wrong when she did speak; Lynnie, who had no courage for herself, when he demanded it, dared everything to be with him. The twenty went back to town; they were only week-enders; the others left

with them; nobody in the vacation camp till Miss Dale could raise more money; it made things easier for Julian and Lynnie. Twice—two happy chances close together—they had time for briefer trips to the Cove. Old Bitter was closer at hand, and almost as secure. Up there in the moonlight he would lie with his head in Lynnie's lap, talking when he felt like it, gazing out over the world, even dozing off to sleep in her dear, undemanding presence, snatched hours, under the sword, but filled with a very rapture of peace.

Days of dust and sun and unbelievably gorgeous odours from the aromatic brush on the mountain-sides; wonderful days of fog when the white hosts marched up the river—and old Ben said the moisture would pretty well save the bean crop, though it couldn't do anything against a fire—and at regular intervals, nagging him, the necessity to write to his mother!

He'd got to be careful about that. He didn't want her changing her mind and ordering him home from the valley now—before it came time for Lynnie to go. If she did—well, it was possible to disobey her and stay on. Equally, of course, if he called her attention to his wanting to be in Siloam, it would rouse her suspicion. He was particularly prompt, therefore, about writing to her. Yet every time he sat down at the library table (Uncle Ben had stored onion sets under it, and had a lot of harness piled over in one corner, yet it still was the library) and began one of these epistles, there came a certain chill upon him. He resisted it; he wouldn't think of things as they used to be back there. Lynnie lived in Las Reudas; she lived within sight of his own home. He put his mind sharply to writing his mother the kind of letter she expected, the kind that would keep her quiet; then he mailed and forget it and returned to his new life.

Lynnie was all to him that brothers, sisters, a father and mother that loved you, normal home surroundings might be to a fellow—yes, and more than that—more than that. There was endless interest in talking to her. Existence, not three blocks distant from him back there in Las Reudas, had been a world away in experience; and yet somehow he always had the other end of pretty much everything she told him.

If she spoke of the chickens they kept, he remembered seeing somebody down there feeding chickens; probably it was the

Willis rooster that waked him so annoyingly in February dawns. When she gave the chronicle of a hen-house theft last spring, and said they knew well enough it was the Daggett boys, Julian knew, too. He had eaten of that chicken, coated with clay and roasted in a campfire up the canyon. In fact, it was what suggested his later offer to the gang of Chicken *à la King*. He didn't tell Lynnie. He just lay and smiled at her as she went on——

"Then father borrowed Lark Thompson's shotgun and carried it down the street and into our house in broad daylight. He went right past the Daggett Grocery, and he stood in our front yard and talked loud, so that the Daggett boys could hear him and see what he had in his hand; and we haven't missed any chickens since."

They were up on Old Bitter, where they could see everything in the valley without being seen, to watch the big gathering at the Mission on San Pablo's day; every kind of vehicle that could be imagined; galloping mounted figures; motorcycles; bicycles; plodding groups on foot; they all drew toward the grey-domed old building down by the sea.

"Father's a Free Thinker," Lynnie said it in a kind of hushed, confessing tone.

"Good for him!" Julian murmured. "I hope I'm one. Thought should be free, shouldn't it?"

"Well, mother doesn't feel so. It's the only thing I ever knew her to cry about—except when brother Ollie died. When she tells father it's wicked not to believe in the Bible, he says, 'God's a fool then—why didn't he make a book I couldn't help believing?' "

In spite of Lynnie's seriousness, Julian laughed a little. He hadn't thought Charley Willis, whom he vaguely remembered as a slight, weedy-looking man around the factory somewhere, had the sand.

"Well," he debated, "as to believing the Bible—you know there are lots more bibles in the world besides ours, Lynnie."

"Are there?" asked Lynnie vaguely—assentingly.

May passed; June; July. Sprinkling wagons had long since been put on the valley road to save the hay crop from getting full of grit, all the byways were shoe-mouth deep in yellow dust; with sand sloughs that nothing but a good machine could

tackle or dare tackle. Ranches, camps and cottages held the usual summer crowd, they infested the beach and streamed up and down the highway, afoot, on horses, in autos. Paula had a big bunch to play with. Her car kept the valley road hot. Julian and Lynnie watched it sometimes from the safety of rough trails or heights where it could not go. The great, hot, rich valley lay humming under the midsummer sun, its fruits on its breast. Pumpkin fields had big yellow globes all through them. The hay was a gorgeous, deep-golden tan. The woods, the stubble-fields, the chaparral were dry as tinder. Last winter's rains had been light and ceased early. People began to talk anxiously about the danger of fire. Occasionally Julian and Lynnie, out on a stolen trip into the Santa Monicas at night, saw a blaze further on in the hills. Once, in daylight, they met a fire warden on his rounds. They asked the man to have a cup of coffee from their thermos bottle.

"If we got fire now, dry as things are," he said as he stood drinking, "and it got into Siloam, it'd make a clean sweep."

Julian had heard that every dry season he spent in the valley. They usually did get fire to some extent. It never had made a clean sweep yet.

Early in August came the explosion of the European war. It didn't seem as though that could concern Julian and Lynnie, yet it instantly and powerfully changed everything in their affairs. The vacation crowd which would normally have left Siloam in the latter part of the month, or early in September, packed up and scattered; within three days the valley was cleared of them.

Thatch, in Siloam to see Alma, reported business at San Vicente and Las Reudas knocked flat by war scare; the McCulloch factory shut down, might not open again, if the war went on and interfered with shipment of drugs from Germany. The papers hardly printed anything but war news, the *Messenger's* columns fairly roared with it. There was already talk of the French and English Reservists in this country being called to the colours; Belgium had been invaded, and the necessity for relief work in the United States began to be discussed. All charitable movements took that direction; Dale Pollard couldn't get a cent for her vacation camp.

Paula talked to him about that. She was going up to town

because her father was ill. Thatch was with Julian at the time, and he snickered when they got past:

"Trying to drink up all the booze in San Vicente; that's what ails Blakely Pollard these days."

They had brought over from the San Pablo express office a new fall suit with the card of Julian's San Francisco tailor on it.

"Hard luck to have it get here just as your girl's leaving," Thatch said, when the big box was handed out.

"Where's your manners, Son?" old Ben grinned. "Young lady. You should say 'young lady' when you're speakin' of Miss Paula Pollard—mentioning no names."

Julian contributed his little laugh at Uncle Ben's joke. But he had an impulse to surprise them with the statement that the only girl he cared about wasn't going to leave the valley.

Mrs. Jordan, who had been taking it easy at "Restlands," rushed off to town to see about a position. While she was away, Lynnie got the chance to stay at the Bruckners', doing a little work for her board.

"Why, I'm glad and thankful," she said when Julian didn't like the idea, and said so. "Everybody back home 's out of a job; looks like a hard winter coming. This is only an hour or two of work at milking time, and all the rest of the day to myself. It'll be a lot different for us—and better—Julian, too."

It was different, when he went to the Hannon's once for dinner; Lynnie came with Alma Bruckner, and he took the two girls home in his car, Lynnie sitting in Alma's lap. Later, when there was an abalone tide very early in the morning, the Bruckners served breakfast to a crowd that went abalone gathering. Lynnie wasn't so timid as she had been on those "Restlands" occasions. He and she just had a good time with the others, and nobody watched them or butted in as Paula had done at those abominable dances.

Beyond this, he was never sure whether the Bruckners, Alma anyhow, knew of their being about together so much. They more than once ventured upon San Pablo with its half-dozen stores, its tamale parlours and motion picture shows. They didn't go to Liveoak because Zoe Haslett, with her grandparents, was at the hotel there; and part of the time the Consadines, mother and son, were down. They had some narrow escapes. Two or three times they met Mr. Hannon, who came and went

at regular intervals in his Ford. But only once did he seem to recognise them, and then he nodded in the most matter-of-fact way. Well, hadn't they been at his house for dinner? Hadn't Julian taken Lynnie home that time?

The resources of San Pablo were limited. Lynnie always longed to go out in one of the glass-bottomed boats through which one looks at the sea gardens down under the water, but was afraid to venture such a trip in broad daylight, in so public a place. But one afternoon when there were few people out, Julian finally coaxed her to go. They made two trips very happily. She insisted that they sit on opposite sides of the boat, though as it chanced both times there were no passengers that could have known them. Getting in from the second trip he noticed Lynnie leaning, sheltering herself behind the woman next her and making distress signals to him. He turned his head and looked, where a motorboat, with two young people in the smartest of sports wear, was cutting its way up to the pier, apparently with the idea of getting to the steps ahead of the glass-bottomed affair. Once close in, under the lee of the pier, it suddenly slowed and hung back, their own boat made the landing, and as Julian was standing in line for the steps, somebody called, cautiously:

"Jule!"

He glanced across, startled. There, in the gay little motorboat, screening herself behind its awning, was Zoe Haslett with Pretty Consadine.

"Jule," she repeated, still in that guarded undertone, "when you get up, look around and see if any of our folks are in sight, will you? If the coast's clear, signal us."

He nodded. When a survey of the upper world showed him no Consadine or Haslett on the horizon, he went back and waved to them, Lynnie holding aloof. When she met him, after the others had gone, it was with the wondering questions:

"What made them act that way? Are they hiding, like us?"

Julian grinned a little.

"Yes, they're hiding, like us."

"Why?"

"Her people fighting it. His, too, for that matter."

"But the young man—and Miss Haslett—they're both rich, you said; and they've got their own money already——"

"Well, neither one's of age yet. When they are, you won't see them dodging any more."

Quietly they skirted the shore, and climbed to sit under the giant liveoaks in the old Spanish cemetery. Nobody to disturb them there; the air sweet with roses, drowsy with the hum of bees. Julian's mind still ran on what they had been speaking of.

"What are you thinking about? You look kind of cross," Lynnie questioned.

"Wondering whether or not I could make a living, if I tried."

She laughed softly.

"You don't have to make a living—Julian," patting his hand.

"Might."

She just looked at him, smiling. Plainly, to her mind he was as securely rich as the two in the motorboat. She didn't understand—but he knew well enough. Pret: when he came of age it meant three millions. Zoe: she had plenty; she'd be free—independent of all authority. He himself was nearly twenty. How much would his status be changed when he was twenty-one? His parents were rich; they'd divided the property, and it made a big fortune for each. But what had he, Julian McCulloch, to depend on? He left his father out of the question. His father didn't like him; would probably never do anything for him. In that sense he was his mother's son, absolutely and humiliatingly dependent upon her good will, her caprices. If he offended her far enough, she wouldn't give him a cent.

Well—time enough to meet trouble when you get to it. Here was he, here was the summer, here was Lynnie. He leaned his head over against her knee; she traced his eyebrow with a forefinger, smoothing out the frown.

Late in August Mrs. Jordan got back, with a little money that had been scraped up to pay her wages and Lynnie's while they should wash, clean, and pack everything in the vacation camp so that it could be stored. The Pollards might not return to their ranch at all. This packing gave Lynnie a better chance to be out with Julian, for the work was so frightfully hard that Mrs. Jordan only tried to make half days at it and gave the girl the rest of her time unquestioned. Indeed, Lynnie seemed tired and out of spirits always now. No wonder, slaving like that!

"Mother's rather not have me come home—now," she startled him one day.

"But Lynnie! You'll want to go when I do."

How oddly she looked at him.

"I don't know that it makes much difference what I want. Father's got the watchman's place, she says. But that's not full wages. With the factory shut down . . . there's nothing for me to do . . . to earn anything."

It was the fifth of September. Lynnie was to have a free afternoon, and Julian had planned to take her up on the ridge beyond Slosson's ranch. They would have to open several gates and go through several pastures to get to the place. He was a little surprised that Lynnie offered no objection to making the trip, right in the middle of the day that way. She seemed to have forgotten to be afraid. And yet she was listless, and apparently a little depressed. Well, it was hot, still, and muggy; and the air smelled of smoke that came from up beyond the Ridge.

He was out of sorts himself. There was a kind of understanding that he would be called home about the fifteenth; but he had an uneasy fear that his mother might change her mind any day and abruptly summon him. Darn sitting on the edge of your chair waiting for somebody to tell you which direction you had to move! Even the Go-devil heated up ridiculously with the climb; she boiled like a kettle. He found he hadn't enough water in the radiator, and, halfway up, had to go in to Slosson's for a pitcherful.

He thought Lynnie would have asked to be let out, but she just sat in the machine waiting for him. As he walked back through the Slosson barn lot, pitcher in hand, he looked at her. How oddly she sat there. He didn't believe she'd moved a muscle since he left her. She didn't turn her head as he came up. Standing facing her at the radiator, pouring in the water, he asked suddenly:

"What're you thinking about?"

"Nothing," she answered.

There was something the matter with the afternoon from the first—no mistake about that. Along the latter part of it they got to talking about the war, and Julian spoke of his grand-

father, General Garnett Julian, who had been in the Confederate Army.

"My grandfather Lloyd was a soldier in the Civil War," Lynnie said. "But he fought against slavery."

What was it in the simple little phrase that put Julian's back up? She seemed to set herself on one side, and him on the other.

"Well," he said finally, "you can't expect me to be particularly opposed to slavery. My people had a big plantation—tobacco—and they couldn't run it without labour. I don't see that it's so different from the factory at Las Reudas."

He lay and looked at her sitting over there. What a pretty head she had when she bent it that way. How long her lashes were, with the eyes cast down. He wished they hadn't begun on this subject. Why should he and Lynnie disagree about it? When she spoke it seemed they did not entirely disagree.

"You talk like Uncle Lem," she said. "He calls factory workers all 'wage slaves.' Uncle Lem's a Socialist."

Silence after that, and there was a curious quality about her silence, somehow. He reached and picked up her hand idly. She wore his ring with the set displayed; she always did when they were out alone together.

"By George!" he said carelessly, "I might have had Thatch bring me down a ring for you from Sherman's. I couldn't find anything decent in San Pablo."

"Yes." Lynnie had drawn the hand away, she was taking off the ring.

"Don't do that," he said. "That isn't what I meant."

"I intended to give it back to you to-day, anyhow."

What an odd tone! She had stopped with the ring half off and half on, never glancing around. Well, it was too big for her. It was a shame he hadn't got her something better before this. His allowance had been piling up in the bank there at San Vicente while he was in the valley. He'd buy her a good solitaire when he got back to town. Yet—he hadn't thought Lynnie was the kind to care so much about that.

"I'd rather you'd keep it for the present," he said, and his tone sounded so stiff that he added a belated—"dear," to the end of the statement.

"Won't you have to have it when you go home, or somebody will notice?" she said.

"Aren't we going back to Las Reudas about the same time?" he put the counter-question. When she didn't answer he raised himself to his elbow, leaned over toward her and tried to look around into her face. "What is it?" he asked.

"Nothing." The one word seemed to be all she could say for quite a while, then she finished more composedly: "I think, maybe, I'll . . . get a chance to stay in the valley . . . for a while—longer."

"Lynnie—what do you mean?" he managed to get a look at her now, but her eyes were cast down, her lips set together, as though she were trying not to cry.

"Well, you know," she fumbled at the ground, picked up a stem of dry grass and twisted it in her fingers, "with the factory shut down, and——" She stopped. The little grass stem took all her attention.

"But you'll want to go home when I go."

He couldn't keep a note of indignation out of his voice. Earlier they had talked so much about how it would be when they were both back in Las Reudas. They would be so much closer. Why, he could look from his sleeping porch at the very door of her house. If the factory was shut down—so much the better. They could say that she had a job somewhere else —over in San Vicente. If he gave her the money that she would have earned, it would leave her free. He'd thought about that. She'd had a hard time. Poor little girl! But back in Las Reudas there would be more ways to do something—to make it easier. What did ail Lynnie? Maybe, after all, it was the ring. He had been neglectful about that. He might have sent to Sherman's himself and had them express him two or three for choice.

Yes, the afternoon was going all wrong. He and Lynnie had hardly mentioned anything they agreed on. Suddenly he thought of something that would make her laugh.

"Tony De Vega's married!" he said.

"What?" She wasn't laughing. How queer she looked!

"Yes," Julian made up for the lack by chuckling himself. "Estancio told us about it at the ranch."

"Are you—sure?" Lynnie's incredulous tone was irritating. "When was he married?"

"When? Why, I don't know—some time last week."

"Last week!" she echoed. The colour left her face. "I don't see—how—that could be!"

"Why shouldn't it be? Estancio said De Vega was in San Pablo selling his cattle; he got drunk, and this girl he'd been hanging around with some roped him in and married him." He was willing to tell her that much, if it salved her vanity any. He supposed a girl felt rather piqued when any man—even a Tony De Vega—who had wanted to marry her went off and married some one else.

"Oh." She sat turned away from him, silent. Then he noticed a little quiver of her shoulders. She was laughing, after all. Laughing himself, he leaned around to look in her face. It was like paper; the very lips were white. Big tears silently overflowed her eyes and ran down her cheeks.

"Lynnie!" he cried and jumped to his feet—moved, furious, absolutely bewildered. She sat there with her head tucked down and openly sobbed. "What's the matter?" he demanded finally.

"Take me home," her voice came low and indistinct.

"We can't go yet—till it gets a little dark." To think of Lynnie proposing anything reckless!

"Oh, all right. Then please don't speak to me again, Julian. I—my head aches."

He went off and stood with his back to her for a while, looking down into the canyon. Estancio had said that De Vega's mother wouldn't stand for the new wife, and that Tony had gone onto his own place, near Slosson's. Across there, not so far as the crow flies, but inaccessible, there was a hut in sight. As he looked a woman came out with a pan and scattered feed for chickens. He could barely see her. It might possibly be De Vega's wife. He stood a minute, staring, feeling more and more angry and offended; then wheeled and walked straight back to Lynnie. She sat just where he had left her, but when she turned her face at sound of his steps he saw she wasn't crying now.

"If you really want to go home as early as this, Lynnie" (he heard his own voice with wonder. Was he quarrelling with her?), "I could drive down this other side of the ridge—I think

I could make it—and we'd use up time going the long way, by the coast road."

"Oh, yes!" She was on her feet in a minute, trying to wipe away the traces of tears without his noticing. "I'd be glad to."

Yet, when she was in the machine and he had started up, ready to head for the canyon road, she checked him with:

"Couldn't we just go down the same way we came up? No danger of anybody seeing us till we get to the valley. You could put me out there; I'll walk home."

"Lynnie!" It sounded very much as though she just didn't want to be where he was. Anything to get away from him. He looked at her and saw she was on the verge of tears again. He softened what he had been about to say. "I don't think it'll do your head any good to walk so far," he muttered.

"It doesn't matter about my head." She swallowed hard, glanced around at him, seemed about to add something—and then didn't. She might as well have said outright that her head didn't ache. She had made it plenty plain.

Not another word was spoken till they came to the floor of the valley. Then, without asking, Julian got out and opened a gate into the McCulloch pastures. He could cut across here and get her a little nearer to "Restlands." Uncle Ben wouldn't be likely to see them. He didn't care if one of the renters did. Lynnie seemed not to care, either. She just sat there and looked straight ahead of her, a little down. His anger against her hurt him dreadfully, and yet when they came to the place that she was to leave the car, he said, letting her get down unhelped:

"I suppose this means that you won't want to go with me to Liveoak—to-morrow night?"

"Oh—to-morrow night?" She stood holding to the side of the roadster, looking up at him with a blank expression in her eyes. "I'd forgotten. Yes, please, Julian—I'd rather not go."

She didn't even say she was sorry. She didn't pretend anything about headache or not feeling like it. She'd just "rather not go!" The whole thing was unbelievable. She took her hand off the machine and stepped back, looking at him a long time, as he sat and looked at her.

They never parted without planning when they should meet next; but now, without another word, she slowly turned and went.

He sat and looked after her—and let her go.

CHAPTER X

FIRE

JULIAN found the house dark, and his supper covered on the table in the arbour. He was sitting there, when old Ben came puffing in, from the D'Aquisto end of the ranch, bringing new word of De Vega. Tony, still drunk, working by himself over beyond Slosson's upper pastures, two miles above the house, and entirely out of sight from it, had started to burn brush and let the fire get away from him. Julian couldn't have heard him if it hadn't concerned Tony De Vega. As it was, he got part and missed part.

"Where was you about five this evening?" the old man asked.

"Over in the D'Aquisto pasture, beyond our hayfield."

"Well—I *thought* that was the Go-devil. But you set so still—an'—" old Ben looked at him curiously,— "Anything wrong with the machine?"

"Yes. Something wrong—with the machine."

Convenient that Uncle Ben didn't ask what. Julian had sat just where Lynnie left him—how long he never knew. The old man was going on about the fire. Drunk or sober, Tony knew better than that. He was a renter himself, and the crop was all a renter had. You take that, you took all.

"But it'll never get across the Ridge. It won't get into the valley." Julian said that mechanically.

"Don't know. Ye can't say. Fire gets out; it's hard to tell. Had word from Slosson to come up and help fight it. Estan's going—to-morrow. Ugh!" he eased himself down into a chair, "Darn Tony De Vega! He ought to be lynched."

Julian walked out and stood in the side yard in the dark. He wished Lynnie could hear Uncle Ben. The roadster was over there a little further. But he'd not go near her; let her make the first move. She was the one who began it.

"Card from your mother in on the li-burry table, Jule," Uncle Ben called.

Julian said nothing. He knew that the card would demand a prompt answer. He couldn't write to-night; he couldn't command his mind. There seemed to be a dull ache in his left side all the time. It got sharp at thought of Lynnie. In the old days when he had believed that he wished he was dead—He looked back to that—he hadn't had anything to feel bad about then! Silently he went into his tent, undressed without switching on the light, and lay down. For a while he held out against Lynnie; she needn't think he'd come running after she'd acted like that. But he couldn't keep it up; it hurt too badly. In agony he took the other side of the argument.

There must be some reasonable explanation of her behaviour about De Vega. No use saying she'd been in love with that Portuguese ever since the night up at the dance. Perhaps she was just trying to make him, Julian, jealous—girls did things like that sometimes. But she'd sat there and cried. Well—but wasn't it something he'd done to make her cry? He hadn't meant to. Yes, but he'd said a lot of disagreeable things. He'd felt, somehow, cross at her. Oh! To-morrow was another day. He was worn out. He and Lynnie would make up again; people always did after a quarrel.

In the morning, Uncle Ben still talking fire to him all the time, Estancio bringing a scare story into the middle of breakfast, he managed to put something down on a sheet of paper, fold it up and get it in an envelope, addressed to his mother at Las Reudas. He'd missed the Siloam mailman. He'd take it into San Pablo and post it. He'd made up his mind to stop on the way and put a leaf under the stone for Lynnie. Whatever she thought or meant, there was no use pouting at her. Anyhow, he couldn't stand it. He couldn't live this way.

He left his leaf, went on and mailed the letter. As he came back, two hours later, he stopped to get his answer. It was the crossed sticks. As he looked at them lying there, and knew that Lynnie's fingers had placed them so, it came over him with a shock that she was refusing him; she meant to quarrel.

Well, she'd got him on the run, if that was any satisfaction to her. He was intensely sorry for himself as he took out those two sticks and replaced the leaf. Then, on the spur of impulse, an invention of the moment, he added a second leaf. Humble pie? He didn't care. He'd eat any amount.

Going up home, passing the Hannon place, he found them out looking at the smoke over in the Santa Monicas, beyond the Ridge. He hadn't paid much attention to it this morning. It didn't seem of any great importance to him with things as they were between himself and Lynnie. But he stopped when they called to him.

"What does Mr. Dye think of it?" Mrs. Hannon came out to the gate to ask. And before Julian could answer, Elinor called from her window:

"They say they've been 'phoning to Paula's father—and they can't get him. I wrote Paula, myself, when Bill Pacheco brought the word yesterday. But it's too soon to hear from her."

"Course I don't want to have the crops burned up," Eileen twittered nervously. "But it's sort of fun."

"Yes," Esther came in "'member year before last, when we made sandwiches and coffee and took 'em up to the fire-fighters and——"

"For goodness' sake hush, girls!" said their mother. "I hope we don't have anything of that sort this year. Julian, tell Mr. Dye we'll do anything we can. I'll 'phone Mr. Hannon. We'll do anything we can."

"I'll tell him, Mrs. Hannon," Julian said, and drove on.

At the ranch the old man was worrying, out in the road, looking for him.

"Glad you got in, Jule."

"Want me to go up in the roadster and see what they're doing, Uncle Ben?" Julian was listless about it, but the old man took him up eagerly.

"I wish you would. Had another word from Slosson. If my high-powered Ford hadn't been bust, and down at Pacheco's garage waiting for him to fix it, or if I was able to set a horse, I'd be up there now. If I felt a little better I'd go with you—b'lieve I will anyhow. All right; fly at it," said Uncle Ben. "We got to load the boat with what's needed."

The getting of the Go-devil ready to fight fire took Julian out of himself a little. The old man's directions came short and sharp. Every demijohn on the place was rinsed, filled with water and put on the machine. By hunting up some that were out in a loft they had collected six.

"Isn't that more than enough?" Julian asked. "How many men do you suppose there are out there?"

"Don't know," briefly. "Slosson'll have his Japs with him. Tony De Vega's there—sober now, and half crazy. And his brother. Six—seven—mebby ten. Got to keep the canteens filled, and water for the sacks. Demijohn don't last long—fighting fire. Find any more sacks in the shed, Jule?"

All the back of the roadster was filled with sacks; axes, as many as the ranch could muster, were laid in on them. They took the short-cut across the McCulloch pastures to Slosson's, and went through his ranch to get to the Ridge—part of the exact route he had travelled yesterday with Lynnie. As they got up into the brush-covered slopes the smell of smoke was stronger; birds were flying toward them.

"Poor souls—drove out of their nests!" old Ben said. "See that," he nodded to where leaves fluttered and rustled in the brush beside the trail. "Rabbits. All sorts o' little critters—burned out o' house an' home. Snakes in there, crawling out, too; manzanita roots'll burn under the surface for weeks. Reckon the ground's pretty hot over beyond there, already."

Ashes drifted toward them; as they got further there were cinders that lasted a few moments. Little half-burned leaves dropped down and were consumed. The road had practically given out; they were following a steep trail.

"How much higher can your Go-devil make it?" old Ben asked.

"To the top of the ridge," Julian said.

"I don't believe you can."

"Know I can. Been up there lot of times, with—the machine."

"Ye have?" Julian felt old Ben pull around to stare at him. They were heading straight for the place where he and Lynnie had sat and quarrelled. What was the difference?

Over the top of the ridge, out from the canyon beyond, as though they were rising from the ground, came Slosson and a Jap.

"Going for water—afoot!" old Ben said.

Straight down the slope toward them, stiffly, like a man walking in his sleep, Slosson kept on. His flannel shirt, torn and thick with ashes, hung open on his chest; his face was smudged,

and pale through the black. As Julian stopped the roadster, he came up, laid a hand on the side of it, and without a word of greeting began speaking in a high tone that wavered and broke.

"What do you people down in the valley mean by the way you're treating me? I've been out fighting this fire for forty-eight hours. I've not had my clothes off for two nights——"

"Shucks, Dan," Uncle Ben tried to break in, "I didn't know 'twas as bad as all that." But Slosson ran right over him with:

"I bring my own Japs and get the Portuguese up there to help me—and then we haven't water for 'em to drink—let alone anything to eat. Get my word, Dye?"

"Sure I did," old Ben answered hastily. "That's what brought us up here. But Nellis was on his way then over to San Pablo. Said he'd send plenty grub from there. Didn't he do it?"

"Sent some baker's bread—no knives to cut it—no butter to go on it—no meat with it!" Slosson let go the car, to throw up his hands and shake them. "We're about all in—an' I don't know what we c'n do. Can't quit."

"Jule and me'll drive on up as far as the machine can make it," old Ben said. "Hop on and ride with us. Needn't go back for water. We got a-plenty. And I've brought grub enough for one feed all round, I guess. Matter o' that, Jule can leave you and me up there and turn back and get more stuff. This little car of his'n can run like the devil. What say he goes in to San Pablo and asks the Colonel for a detail of soldiers from the Presidio to help us?"

"All right—if Colonel Scott'll feed 'em," said Slosson sullenly as he got on the running-board, and they began again climbing the hill. "I don't want any more men out here hungry."

They crossed the open spot of yesterday's quarrel, going toward that rough canyon road he had suggested to Lynnie as a homeward trail to kill time. Julian's foot came down hard on the accelerator. The Go-devil jumped like a spurred horse. He had pretty nearly bumped Slosson and the Jap off, before he realised what he was doing. The smoke, ahead there, poured up thick now. They began to hear the rattle of burning brush. He came to himself with Slosson saying:

"Guess you'd better not drive in any closer. Unload here;

and I'd be glad enough if you'd go back to the Presidio. No use 'phoning the Colonel. You won't get anything that way."

The Go-devil was stopped, the load thrown off. Ashes fell so thick here that you had to be on your guard to keep blazing cinders off shoulders and hat brim. Slosson took some food and began to eat in a famished way. The Jap, a big sandwich in one hand, a demijohn in the other, set off at a sort of dog trot over the turn for the fire.

Julian stood a minute looking at the two older men.

"Am I to go back now, Uncle Ben?" he asked. He would rather have followed the Jap.

"Yep. Take the short-cut through by Liveoak, son. It'll be hard on your tires, but——"

"He'll have to go by Bruckner's and bring up more sacks," Slosson spoke between bites. "The Hannons ain't done a thing for us. Think because they ain't got any ranch or hay crop—wait till their house burns over their heads!"

"All right, Dan! All right, Dan!" Uncle Ben put that by. "Don't you reckon he better just come back that way? Don't you reckon he better get to the Presidio quick as ever he can? Understand, Jule? Goin', don't stop at all; but comin', tell everybody you meet. And last thing, come by our place and bring D'Aquisto. He wants to come. He'll have axes and sacks gethered up. Bring all of either that anybody'll let you have."

At the Presidio Julian stood and saw the detail of soldiers answer the bugle call, form in square, the teamsters running to the corrals for their mules and wagons, beginning to get harnessed like firemen, the cooks racing up from their quarters, the rations for three days being served out. More and more the spirit of the thing was getting to him.

Passing Hannon's store he was hailed, and Hannon himself came hurrying out to hand up a box of heavy canvas gloves, such as drivers and motormen use.

On the San Pablo grade he met the Ashby girls, and stopped to speak to them, asking them to spread the word old Ben had given; things were bad on the ridge; it looked as though the fire might get over into the valley. When he got to the Mission and the garage, old Pacheco was pretty short with him.

"'Your news ain't no news, Mr. McCulloch. We been knowin'

that for two days. My boy's been up there with the fire-fighters since yesterday. You just found it out?"

Passing "Restlands," Mrs. Jordan coming down the lane, he drove slowly, and finally stopped.

"Are you on your way up to the fire?" she looked at his load.

"Yes." His eyes searched the place in vain for Lynnie.

"Miss Dale's coming down on the midnight train, bringing Mr. Lemaire with her, to make pictures for her write-up of it. Miss Paula's along, too, I think. Did you get the soldiers?"

"Yes, Mrs. Jordan. Shall you go up with Miss Pollard to see the fire?"

"Oh, I don't know. I guess Lynn might, anyhow," Mrs. Jordan said.

He left her, and turned in toward Bruckner's. A basket of food was waiting for him there. He asked Alma if she and Lynnie Willis wouldn't like to go up to the fire. She thought they would in the morning, maybe, when Miss Dale got in—there was a big crowd going/then—and added that Lynnie had been over just a while ago, and they'd been talking about it.

If she'd been to Bruckner's, she had passed their post-office. She had got his message. There would be an answer there for him. Quite confidently he ran into the hollow, stopped, jumped down, turned the stone. There lay the two leaves side by side. Had she looked at them—and refused him an answer? Had she passed the stone and not cared to look?

He couldn't stay to argue that now. The men up there fighting fire needed what he was bringing them. He got into the car and drove on.

D'Aquisto was waiting for him with the sacks and axes. He said Dye was still on the ridge. Going through the Slosson place they saw the mounted soldiers trotting in at the big gate. The cook wagon, the ambulance with its red cross, were drawn up, the men jumped down, horses were tied and fed in an orderly line; the cooking fires were started; and when they looked back from the turn on the Ridge road they could see the camp, neat, businesslike, almost as though it had been there for a week, and hear the bugle sounding the supper call.

"Fine—ain't it?" said D'Aquisto.

On the top of the Ridge, evening coming on, the fire showed up much more strongly. Julian ran the Go-devil to the point

where he had left Uncle Ben and Slosson. Dusky bushes; wind; the roaring of the fire; nobody there. D'Aquisto dragged off an armload of his own supplies and started along the path. Julian followed. Close up like this the noise of the fire was terrible. When the flames reached a bit of greasewood there would be an outburst like the rattle of musketry. He saw D'Aquisto bobbing along, then lost him in a glimpse of the line of men working, swinging wet sacks. There was no trail any longer under his feet; he stumbled around a shoulder of the ridge; suddenly, out of the glare before him, seemed to leap the figure of a man meeting him, a queer scarecrow, jet black against the flare, ragged, that shrieked in a poor little husky, high, whimpering pipe of a voice:

"Where's them axes?"

It was Tony De Vega. Julian stopped and the fellow ran up to him—stark mad. Convicted of empty hands, Julian turned back, De Vega at his heels.

"Soldiers?" he heard the Portuguese crying out behind him, and answered:

"Be here when they've had their supper. Camped in the field below."

"Supper!" They had reached the Go-devil now. De Vega stood waiting. "My God!—I don't know when I've had any kind of a meal."

Julian got out the axes. This was the man Lynnie had cried about. The fire, the necessity to fight it, took second place. Yet he heard himself saying as he kept one of the axes out of the bundle he gave De Vega:

"I'm going back with you."

"Hold on, Jule—that won't do!" old Ben popped up from somewhere and yelled after him. There was Bill Pacheco, too, grabbing an axe from De Vega. Julian didn't answer. He just sprinted along through the dark with De Vega and Bill, leaping low brush, guessing the path, missing it half the time.

Down at the front, he found that the axes were needed for cutting brush where Slosson had decided that they must back-fire. Some newcomer tried to take Julian's away from him, and then when he wouldn't give it up, said:

"Oh, you goin' to work? Go to it, then."

He went to it. It seemed to him a long time that he swung

SUDDENLY, OUT OF THE GLARE BEFORE HIM, LEAPED THE FIGURE OF A MAN, THAT SHRIEKED: "WHERE'S THEM AXES?"

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that axe, the other men about him swinging their axes; slashing away down the line of brush; being turned back by the overseer; cursed sometimes; sometimes spoken to with that high, strained voice and foolish laugh. They were all frantic here, crazed with the lack of sleep, strain and exhaustion.

They got a space cleared, and the brush dragged off it; other men with horses were attending to that. Then the backfiring began, and he had a wet sack shoved into his hand and was told to use it.

He was one in the line of sack swingers—right up against the fire—flailing with the wet burlap in a sort of unison. The wood smoke stung his eyes frightfully; it strangled him and made him dizzy—crazy like the rest. He worked on and on here—hours, it seemed. There was no place to quit. The blaze was like a living thing that would leap out at you if you didn't keep hitting at it—if you slacked a minute to get more water on your sack. The roaring of the fire, the roaring of those about him, the yelling and jabbering, the straining—he lost his sense of identity and came to himself suddenly with Bill Pacheco offering him gloves out of the box from Hannon's.

The minute he stumbled free of the line somebody had surged into his place. He stood there and looked at the sack in his hands. It had been dried and afire half a dozen times. There wasn't much left of it.

"Better put on a pair of these gloves," Pacheco urged.

"No."

"Gosh! Yer hand's burnt a'ready!"

He noticed now a raw, red streak on the back of his right hand.

"Hadn't you better go to the am'lance with that?" Bill was suggesting, when a man with a red cross on his arm took hold of Julian's shoulder, wheeled him around, and the next thing he knew his hand was being bandaged.

"That'll keep the fire off it," the army doctor said as he released him.

Back with the yelling fire-fighters. Through all the noise and confusion, the dull aching of the burn on his hand, what was this sense of awful calamity? The fire—yes—the fire—but what was the dreadful thing that happened *before* the fire? It must be ten o'clock. Somebody said Dale Pollard was coming up on

the Ridge and—— Oh, it all rushed over him with that! Lynnie. She didn't love him any more. She'd rather have had Tony De Vega, over there!

There followed a time when nothing coherent was in his mind. His grief—the work—they swung together, and got into his head like drink. He could hardly tell whether he was thinking of her or fighting the fire.

It was all his fault—not hers. Slam, crash—he'd get that blazing bush down if it burned the backs of his hands to the bone. She had good reason for anything she felt—or didn't feel—about him. When had he ever done anything for her—that he even might have done? Money in his pocket—plenty . . . Dressed in the best . . . Poor little shabby girl with only one pair of broken shoes . . . When he got her a pair of slippers —poor, miserable things—and she spoiled them walking in the sand . . . he offered to get her another pair. That's what he did. He offered. Did he ever get them?

No use to deny that he'd felt he was Julian McCulloch, and it was a privilege for a girl like Lynnie Willis to love him—to be loved by him. Needn't deny it. He'd acted it. Infernal, stuck-up fool! Brute, too. Tony De Vega over there cut a better figure as a lover than he did.

The sacks got renewed now systematically. The soldiers were in. He might have stopped. But there was no relief for him but this beastly hard labour and danger. Automatically he dropped his sack and grabbed an axe, throwing it up with an intake of breath, bringing it down with a grunt. Lynnie's eyes overflowed by tears were before him. She had been crying for another man. But oh, he wouldn't have cared for that—if she'd only cried on his breast! If she'd let him put his arms around her and comfort her!

So his soul battled all through that dreadful night, while he swung sack or axe, was dragged away from the work or shoved at it, blundered over to the demijohns for water, drank the coffee and ate the food that was put in his hands. Voices dinned at him to go home—what was he doing there! Others shouted, "Good man, Jule McCulloch! Attaboy! Stay with it!" His body was pushed hither and thither, hurt some, and unspeakably wearied; but his mind never left Lynnie for an instant. She would come in the morning—when Dale Pollard did. He

would get a chance . . . he would say to her, then. . . . Well, he'd say enough. He'd say the right thing this time.

The soldiers lifted the work along splendidly. One of them had just taken his place in the line, letting him stagger out once more to the demijohns for a drink. He was standing swallowing like a famished animal when a pair of hands reached around from behind and blinded his eyes, and a girl's whisper demanded:

"Guess who?" Once, since the soldiers came, he had thought he saw a familiar figure steal down close to the other end of the line. Through the smoke, the haze of confusion in his own mind, and despite the khaki riding skirt, the cavalry shirt and man's hat pulled down on the head, he thought he knew who that was. Now he pushed the hands away, and looked around. Yes, this was Rose Daggett.

"Oh," he said stupidly, straightening up, staring at her, "you back at 'Restlands'?"

"Bet yer neck I ain't," Rose grinned. "I'm livin' in San Pablo. My soldier boy's up here fightin' fire—that was him took your place in the line just now."

"Yes."

"That's my horse over there. Say, do you know if Miss Dale's up here yet this morning?"

"This morning!" he echoed, and looked around him, dazed. It was broad daylight.

Across where the horses were held a man sat slumped down, his arms hanging straight before him, his body looking as though every bone in it were broken—Tony De Vega. From the upward trail sounded women's voices.

"Bet that's Miss Dale, now!" Rose cried, turned and ran.

Julian was trying to steady his breathing. Now that he had stopped moving he could hardly get started again. He'd wait for her here. She was coming. Slosson rounded the big rock to the demijohns, looked at him a minute curiously, then said:

"Better go home and get to bed, kid. You're about all in."

Then another man, Slosson's brother, he thought, came up coughing, rubbing his eyes, choking out:

"Hold on a minute. That young McCulloch?—Miss Dale Pollard's looking for him."

Julian's head was humming so that he hardly knew where

he was, or who. He tried to go forward, stumbled over a pile of coats, and the next thing he knew he was shaking hands with Miss Dale Pollard, Lemaire at her shoulder. Lynnie was not with them.

"Oh—have you burned your hand?" She saw the bandages. "We think it's awfully fine of you, Jule, to turn in and work this way."

"Want a photograph of you," added Lemaire. "If you'll stand there a minute I'll take it now. That's all right—just as you are. Thank you."

Paula came around the big rock.

"Oh, there he is! You've found him. Have you told him what Mr. Dye said? You're to go back to the ranch, Jule. We promised Mr. Dye we'd get you started back." Then to her aunt, "You needn't keep a place for me in the machine, Aunt Dale. If Jule wants me to drive him down in his roadster——"

"Thank you"; he pulled himself together and tried to think out the situation, "I'm not going down, yet." Then, in the midst of their protests, "Miss Pollard, did—Alma Bruckner—come with you people?"

"Not with us; they're here somewhere—I think. Jule, you mustn't go back into that fire!"

"I won't."

"Paula—I need you. Wait, Mr. Slosson!" Miss Dale hurried her crowd across and up the slope.

Julian waited a minute looking about him, then plodded with dragging feet over toward the horses. De Vega was there still. He saw a glimpse of a girl's sleeve—some one standing beyond Rose's horse. He got far enough around to see clearly; it was Lynnie standing there, De Vega grovelling on the ground at her feet. As he came close he heard the strange, crazy whimpering of De Vega's voice:

"I never got it! My God, Leenie! Do you think I would have married some one else—drunk or sober—if I'd got it?"

He kept on going—right up to them. De Vega, there on the ground on his knees, turned and stretched a shaking hand.

"See," he appealed, "she tell me now she wrote me a letter—to say she'd have me—and I never got it. I was in San Pablo—drunk as a dog. Oh, Leenie!"

Lynnie stood there; she didn't look down at De Vega; she

didn't look at Julian. Her face was raised, and so white that, when the eyes closed for a minute, it seemed to float, a drowned thing.

"What's the use?" she whispered. "It's too late."

He couldn't believe it. Was he crazy? He lifted his eyes. There were Paula, Miss Dale and the photographer signalling and beckoning from the top of the slope.

"We're going now, dear," Miss Dale called to Lynnie. "Come on."

He stood and watched her go. De Vega got up and shambled back to the fire-fighters.

Well, he was done—he was all in. Maybe he'd better have let Paula take him down; he wasn't sure he could drive his roadster; but he crawled back to it and sat on the running-board a while till he felt a little better. Then Estancio came along; he must have told the boy to drive, for pretty soon they were getting down the Ridge. Estan was an awful driver. The chances were against their getting to the bottom alive. Well—what difference? All the way Estan was gabbling: They had the fire under control now. Wasn't the camp fine? B'lieved he'd like to be a soldier himself—if we go to war. When they got to the ranch there was something about Uncle Ben being still up on the Ridge, and Estan going back after him.

"Guess I'd better take the Ford this time—Pacheco's got it fixed—huh?" he repeated. When Julian didn't make any answer for a minute or two, the boy added, "I'm afraid I done something to the Go-devil there at that turn by Slosson's barn. She thumps awful funny.

"Take either one. I don't care." Julian dragged himself into his tent, threw himself on the cot there—and oblivion closed over him.

CHAPTER XI

NEVER ANY MORE

SOMETHING fell on his cot with a thump. Dimly he looked down at it—a rolled-up newspaper, and it had struck the back of his bandaged hand. That roused him a little more. Uncle Ben called from outside the tent curtains:

"Slept the clock round, boy—and then some." The old man poked his head in. "Take a look-see at that *Messenger*. You're quite some little hero! I'll go get you a cup of coffee. It's near two o'clock."

Julian lay and stared for a while trying to get awake. He felt fairly drugged with sleep. What was the dream Uncle Ben had waked him from? Then with a pang he knew that it was of Lynnie. He rolled over on his side and shut his eyes. Why did he have to wake? Oh, God—he wished he'd never wake again!

Clumsily he unfolded the paper, and read Dale Pollard's account of the Montana County fire. His picture—the one Lemaire had made—was in the middle of the page, looking queer and snapshotty and flaring-eyed. The line under it ran:

"YOUTHFUL MILLIONAIRE AMONG FIRE FIGHTERS. JULIAN McCULLOCH WORKS WITH THE MEN ON THE McCULLOCH RANCH TO SAVE SILOAM VALLEY."

He lay and looked at it a long time.

No use. Suddenly he hurled himself out of bed and dressed. All the time he was making an effort to eat some breakfast Uncle Ben was talking to him excitedly about that stuff in the paper, fairly crowing, taking a lot of credit to himself. Then the telephone began to ring. They called for him; he wouldn't have gone, but Uncle Ben let him in for it. It was Paula offering congratulations. She talked and talked. Julian didn't know what he answered. She was no sooner off the line than

long-distance called for Uncle Ben. The old man came limping in, beaming as he took up the receiver.

"Yes—yes, this is the McCulloch ranch. Dye speaking." He listened a minute; his face fell comically. "Well—I didn't think you'd take it that way, Nettie." A pause, evidently filled in by remarks from the other end of the line; then, "Why, no—no—I don't s'pose it was any too safe. Oh, the boy's all in good shape. He's right here now. He can speak for himself. Jule——"

Julian came slowly forward, but Uncle Ben put up a hand, with:

"She doesn't want you, after all. Wait a minute. All right, Nettie. To-morrow morning. Oh, this evening? Well—that's kind of crowding the mourners, ain't it? Uh, all right. I'll tell him. What say? The four-thirty? He's got to meet the four-thirty in San Pablo this evening? Well. Well. Is that all? Good-bye," and he hung up.

"Well, Jule," he faced the boy sheepishly, "your mother's on the rampage. Says I ought not to have let you go up there with the fire-fighters, and——"

"What was that about meeting the four-thirty?" Julian interrupted.

"Why—she—er—she says Calkins is on it. You're to take the machine over and get him."

There was a moment of chagrined silence.

"You understand what Calkins's comin' means?" old Ben eyed him anxiously. "He's to take you right back home to-morrow. Makes me feel cheap. Nettie lays it on thick—sending Calkins up here for you—'zif I couldn't even be trusted to start you home all right. Well—I don't know when I've had such a callin' down."

"If I'm to meet the four-thirty, I'd better start now," Julian said. Then in answer to old Ben's look of surprise, "I've—I've got another errand."

"You bet you have!" old Ben cheered up a bit as Julian went into the hall for his hat. "I reckon you spell that errand g-i-r-l—heh?" Then, as the boy made no answer, "Tell Miss Paula I said that's a fine piece her aunt put in the paper."

Out on the road everybody he met waved at him or stopped him for congratulations.

"It would have been in Siloam by now if you hadn't gone and got the soldiers!" they hailed him. He hardly knew what he answered any of them.

He got to "Restlands" and was turning in at the lane. He was at the end of his endurance in the matter of Lynnie. He'd got to have a chance to see her, to speak to her plainly. He was done with dodging and concealing. There was nothing left to conceal. He would go soberly up to the house and ask for her. He heard a faint call back of him, from the direction of the hollow, and there she stood. He ran back toward her a little way and stopped. She didn't come up close to him, but checked several steps away, hesitating:

"Did—did you want to see me, Julian?"

He looked at her standing there, just the same Lynnie—yet——

"Oh, Lynnie!" he cried, "I've got to have some explanation."

"What?" Her eyes begged him to let her alone. Her pale little face was suddenly burning red; then the colour died out of it. She looked over her shoulder. There was some one across by Bruckner's, coming closer. She halted a step nearer and spoke low.

"Oh, no," she protested.

"Yes," he said doggedly, "I've got to see you. We've got to understand each other. I have to go in town for Calkins now; but I'll be in there—by the stone—at eight o'clock to-night."

"I—Julian, I can't——"

"Well—nine, then."

"But I don't see——"

"Ten. Ten o'clock. Surely you can get away by that time. I'll wait till you come—if it's midnight."

She didn't answer that. She was turning away.

"Lynnie!" he called cautiously. "You know it's our last chance. I'm to leave with Calkins in the morning."

She just nodded over her shoulder without a word. He didn't know—he had to drive on without knowing—whether she meant to come or not.

Julian had very little remembrance afterward of that trip to San Pablo. Circumstances were closing in on him; he must think. And he couldn't think. Fruitless mental wrestling about took up his attention till he was gingerly shaking hands with

Calkins on the platform at San Pablo. There were a lot of people there; they all seemed to be noticing him. The newsstand showed a border of San Vicente *Messengers*, with the portrait Lemaire had made staring at him from the middle of the page.

"Proud of you, Jule." That was Calkins's first word. "Not because you got your picture in the paper, but for what you did that put it there."

"Nothing extraordinary." They were getting over to the machine. "No more than some of the Japs."

"Oh, yes—but that's the point," Calkins laughed a little. "You're not a Jap—hired. You aren't even like one of the soldiers they got from the Presidio—a man told off to face danger. You're one of the rich fellows. People like to think of your sort risking something for the public good."

Julian got in and took the wheel. He sat looking straight ahead of him for a long time. Finally he said rather huskily, to Calkins, standing with a hand on the side of the car:

"Thank you, sir."

Calkins was a good sort. The tutor's cheery, wholesome, commonplace presence brought a sudden, terrible ground-swell of remorse that he had made nothing—ever—of such a human, accessible source of counsel. Well—it was too late. Things were out of his hands now. Whatever he had to say to anybody wouldn't be his own secret. It was up to him to be a man. Unconsciously he squared his shoulders as he sat at the wheel.

"You're looking well," Calkins said, "in spite of showing the marks of your fire fighting. I told your mother I thought you'd be all right to make the trip up to-morrow——?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then we'll start in the morning. She's giving a breakfast-concert on Thursday—Belgian relief. Wants you to play."

"I'm all out of practice."

"You were to go past the San Vicente apartment and get the music—the Peer Gynt suite. Probably she thought you'd have time to brush up on it. How about your hand?" He looked at the bandaged fingers.

"I guess it would be all right—by then."

"And your birthday party this year is a luncheon."

"What? Pardon me—I wasn't paying any attention."

"Wake up—wake up!" Calkins laughed. "Your birthday—you're twenty next Friday, young fellow. Had you forgotten that? I've got a note for you from your mother," he reached in his pocket, "probably that covers all these points." The heavy, square envelope with its monogram was passed over. "I'll step into the station and 'phone her to say that I found you all right; then we'll be off."

Julian sat in the machine and read his mother's note. It was brief; a few sentences gave her opinion of his fire fighting. The word about his proposed party was, "I shall celebrate your birthday, as usual." Beyond that, she condemned him vaguely, yet sweepingly, and ordered him peremptorily back to Las Reudas next morning with his tutor. One statement occurred twice: at the opening of the note his mother said, "I have had your room done over;" and at the end she repeated, "Your room has been entirely redecorated," as though the matter were of importance. He groped a minute for some meaning, then gave it up. The whole note smelled of jail, so far as he was concerned, and that was all there was to it. He was still sitting with it in his hand, looking at it, apathetically, when Calkins got back.

"Your mother takes a woman's point of view of the matter," the tutor said, after a quick look at Julian's face. "I suppose it's a mother's view—a sort of 'I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier' way of looking at things."

Calkins got in, and Julian started the car. He drove, and Calkins let him alone. Almost nothing was said between them till they turned into the Valley road.

"Been a pretty good summer, Jule?" the tutor asked, then.

"Pretty good." Julian knew he would never again be able to characterise things in the listless fashion that had once been his. All heaven and hell were behind the veil of those two words he accepted to describe the summer just passed in Siloam Valley.

Calkins looked at him again curiously, examined him at short range, and finally said,

"Comes the nearest to being out on your own that you've ever been. Well—I think it's done you good. I believe it's made a man of you."

They were getting up toward "Restlands." If the past summer had made a man of Julian, then he felt that being a man

was a sizable thing—and tragic. Well, perhaps being a man was all right; it was the making of a man out of a soft boob of a kid that was a good deal like nailing you to a cross and letting you hang there till you found out. Stealthily his eyes scouted over toward the vacation camp. Nothing but the gables of the big house, the end of one of the cabins, could be seen from here through the trees. They were too far off to recognise any one who might be moving about there. He ran slowly and more slowly. Then, just as they got to the corner of the field he saw Lynnie, with Mrs. Jordan, coming down the lane. He spoke to them; and Calkins also lifted his hat.

"Was that the little Willis girl?" the tutor asked, when they had gone by. He glanced back. "Has the child been sick? How white she looked!"

Julian made no answer. The Go-devil shot ahead.

"Hel-lo!" Calkins grabbed for his cap. He pulled it down over his ears. Julian never slackened the pace till they got to the ranch gate. It stood open. He took the turn on two wheels.

"Do you often make it that way?" Calkins laughed, as the roadster stopped abruptly in the side yard. The tutor got down, and lifted out his overnight bag. Still Julian sat in the machine. "Would you mind telling Uncle Ben that I don't want any dinner, Mr. Calkins?" he said finally. "I—I had something to eat in San Pablo," in answer to the other's surprised look. "If we've got to make an early start—I—— Get my packing done now."

"Oh, certainly." With a little hesitation, Calkins turned and entered the house.

Over in his tent Julian dragged out bags and suitcases, and threw his things into them any way. With a final glance around, he went out to the roadster, made a back turn, and got to the road again. Somehow he couldn't think at all. He held fast to the idea that Lynnie would be waiting for him down in the hollow at ten o'clock. She knew that he had to leave the valley to-morrow morning. . . .

At ten o'clock he went into the hollow. Even before he gave the customary little sequence of modulated whistles he knew that Lynnie was not there, yet he stopped every now and then to signal softly again. No answer. Well, then, surely a message. In the dark he found the boulder and knelt beside

it. For a long time he crouched there, afraid to lift the stone and look. Finally, with a sudden, nervous movement, he jerked it up, and dropped his palm on two twigs that lay there.

They were crossed. They said "No" to him. They denied him.

He tried to convince himself that he had disturbed them in getting the stone up. Yes, that was it. He had pushed them around that way. She had left them parallel. That meant, "Wait for me—I may be late." Anyhow, he would wait.

Numb with the shock of unbearable disappointment, he leaned forward, and, fumbling, pushed the two little twigs around parallel as though to force fate or facts. As he did so, paper rustled under them. Ah-h-h, a note!

He got out his electric torch, dropped it in his excitement, picked it up, and at last threw its little circle of pale light on a small, wadded paper under the stone. The light went off of it as he dropped his flash again. It wasn't a note, anyhow; he grabbed for it, and felt through the folds—his ring. His fingers were all thumbs getting the light to bear once more on the scrap of paper that wrapped the ring. When at last he could see it, he found written with a hard pencil—such as hang in kitchens beside grocery lists or laundry memoranda—a dim, grey scrawl without address or signature—"Never any more."

He just sat there. He found a saying of old Ben's churning over and over in his mind—"Never's a long time." A long time. He stood up presently, the paper in his hand—desperate. Lynnie knew that he would have to leave the Valley at dawn. She had written that—and she knew! Oh—what a fool he was! . . . She said never. . . . And never was a long time. He looked about him at the night in silence. He couldn't go in the morning and leave things like this. Well—she was right across there at "Restlands"; but would she answer his signal? Could he have a human word with her? No. Not any more than as though she were locked up in San Quentin.

He went finally and leaned by his machine in the still, empty road, that was, after all, just a pine needle carpeted sand trail. He snapped on the lights, took his mother's letter out of his pocket, and wrote a few words to Lynnie—beseeching—incoherent—on the blank bit at its back.

He had ripped the sheet apart before the utter futility of

this came home to him. He went back and closed down the stone without putting anything under it.

When he reached the main road he didn't know which way to turn. He looked over to "Restlands"—back toward the ranch—and suddenly pulled the wheel around and slewed the Go-devil in the third direction that was left for him. After he got started there was no thought of turning back. He held on for the coast. There would be a late moon. The wind was chilly, but there were tracts of sun-warmed air, where cupped slopes had held the heat. He passed through these as though they were friendly presences. On he went down the sleeping valley. He left behind him the scene of this summer which Calkins said had made a man of him. The sea wind—male, courageous, vitalising—began to lift his hair and talk to him. Finally the stone dome of the Mission showed in silhouette between the low hills, against the night sky. He knew then what he had come for. When everything fails, you reach out and try to get hold of the skirts of the unseen.

Pacheco's dogs raged their hearts out at him as he went past. There was a light at the garage, but nobody about. He rolled in to the Mission field beside the old building, left his car in an angle of the ruined cloister and found his way to where the key hung, got it and let himself in.

The place was as big as all darkness. The glimmering circle of his flash only showed him broken stone pavements, the corner of a wall, and faded out in the obscurity of the dome. He got to the altar, and down in front of it. He didn't consciously come there to pray; yet such hurried and desperate thinking as went on in his mind had, binding it together, a thread of supplication.

"Don't—don't—don't!" he seemed to be begging some vast, black Power that was closing in on him. Nothing sane or commonplace came at first. From the wonted thought of Lynnie as a little, twining, soft lover, he had swung to the idea of her as a changeling, a sphinx. And she hated him. Would she hate him always? Why? Oh, the queer jumble of ideas he had been furnished with offered a reason for that. Was he a monster? Was he? How did he come to be like this, anyhow?

Before the eyes of this passionate inquiry came the vision of his father and mother. Stephen McCulloch going his own

way like a bachelor; his wife, beautiful still, treating her husband with a politeness that was somehow insulting—Julian had accepted their manner of life as children in a house do. Yet here to-night there flared up in him an accusing flame of question. He was the son of these two. They must have loved each other once—else how had he, Julian, ever come about? Where had he come from? And why had they brought him here if they never meant to give him any light on the road they had set him in?

So he agonised the night through, able mostly to see nothing but Lynnie's face; strange, strained, pitiful, suddenly red, and then startlingly white, as he had seen it last; laughing at him across the table on the Lodge porch; lying like a flower against the shoulder of his black coat that night at the Portuguese dance—Lynnie, as she had been to him. Meetings and partings with her—little things she'd said—the first time he kissed her there in the chaparral . . . the other kiss, the second kiss, that he was too timid then to take; it all came back with strange, new meaning as he knelt in the dark.

In San Pablo that morning, putting her on the stage, and the next Sunday, going down to Smuggler's Cove, he had talked a lot about blaming himself, and given her a chance to blame him. But she hadn't. It was down at the Cove—at thought of it came that queer closing-up of the throat that he used to have when he was a little fellow and anything broke his heart. It was down there she first said she loved him. Now, retracing the steps of their love, questioning everything in an agony of doubt, it seemed to him that all along she had only responded because he demanded. Maybe she hadn't, from the first, cared anything like as much about him as he did about her. Or, maybe—and worse—she had cared then and gotten over it, because of his selfish inconsiderateness. He'd been a brute to her. Why wouldn't she think she'd rather marry a man like De Vega even, to get away from him and his kind of love?

And he'd have to go and leave her just like this. There wasn't time, there wasn't any chance for a better word with her. He'd have to trust that when he saw her next in Las Reudas— Something seemed to shut down blacker than ever —as though he never would see her in Las Reudas. He could only kneel there in the dark, each long, shivering breath a

supplication. Time was forgotten. He finally wearied out his emotions rather than won to any peace.

When at last he let himself out of the church he found the night was over. The east was pink. He hurried to reach the ranch.

The first thing he saw when he got there was Calkins coming out of his—Julian's—tent. There was no word said, though it must have been plain that the cot there hadn't been slept in. Instead, when Uncle Ben called "Breakfast!" from the front porch, and added, "Where you been so early, Jule?" Calkins seemed intentionally to get in the way so that no answer was necessary.

CHAPTER XII

THE HOMECOMING

FROM the moment they went through the ranch gate into the main road, Julian drove as though the furies chased him. He had on the sweater bought in San Pablo, the one Lynnie had worn; he sat with his chin dropped in the collar of it, staring ahead, so sunk in his own thoughts, wrestling so hard with his own distress, that the first notice he had of Calkins's uneasiness was when his downward glance caught the feet over there beyond his automatically "braking" the flying roadster. Then he became conscious, vaguely, of a continual, sidelong study.

But he went on through San Pablo without ever shifting his gaze from the street in front of him. He knew what he'd see—the San Pablo House, the motion picture theatre, the sidewalks where he and Lynnie had strolled arm in arm. It was enough to get them out of the corner of his eye. He sent the Go-devil out again on the State Highway, glad to be on less familiar ground, whipped at last into a willingness to go home to Las Reudas. He made it at forty—forty-five—fifty miles. He saw without noting that everything they met or passed pulled out to the side with scared, indignant haste.

"I say, Jule"—Calkins's words and the half-laugh that went with them were snatched from his lips by the wind of their going —"if you keep up this clip you'll get us pinched."

"Huh?" For a moment he couldn't make any sense out of what Calk was saying. For a moment he looked at the tutor and couldn't see him. Then he hunched his shoulder and nodded—but the speed of the Go-devil didn't slacken.

After that he was dimly aware of Calkins's continual, half-hearted movements to open speech with him about last night. Of course he'd want to—he'd feel that he ought. As they flew on roaring, again and again he leaned close, seemed about to

say something—and then gave it up. It seemed to Julian that he knew this only as one inside a room, in the midst of some terrible issue, might be aware of a fly crawling up a window-pane. Calkins was all right. Calkins wasn't a bad sort; he'd been a brick about that getting drunk. But—well, it was too late. There was nothing he had to say to Calkins now.

So he kept still, conscious that it was crazy behaviour; he looked dead ahead because he was seeing things there in the road, straight before him—things he had now to face. When he could get rid of the people and be alone with himself he'd face them—he'd think. Now he could only feel—and suffer. The sweater—it was like Lynnie's arms around him—her arms, would they ever be around him again?

The little roadhouse high in the Pass, where they stopped for lunch, was merely a confused recollection of being asked if he would have things, declining or accepting, but hardly rousing himself enough to eat. Once more back in the Go-devil, he could only sit and drive the machine and stare ahead. He was neither glad nor sorry to see the familiar wooden façade of Calkins's boarding-house in San Vicente. He drew a long breath and looked about him. Over there was the campus of the Normal. School had begun. Boys he knew were about. He nodded to some, and was aware afterward that he had overlooked others. Calkins got out, stopped on the sidewalk, reaching to get his bag and the package of books he had had.

"You won't forget to go past the apartments and take out that music your mother wants? Julian"—laughing a little—"are you listening?"

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I remember now. I'll attend to it."

Calkins let him go then, with only the commonplace arrangement that they begin lessons the second Monday following.

The Antoinette Apartments were on the corner of Arbolado and Twenty-ninth. Julian stopped there, had the hallman let him in to Mrs. McCulloch's apartment. He went to the music cabinet by the satinwood piano—the apartment was done in French greys and old rose—and hunted out the volume of Grieg which he knew was there.

It was neither a relief nor particularly a distress to be alone as he headed his machine from San Vicente toward the heights

of Las Reudas. He wasn't moving by any particular plan, yet he swung down on the lower road and went past the factory. The place was closed now, but he saw some people whom he knew and spoke to. Among others, Willis was crossing from the boiler house to the packing room carrying some boards and tools. The sight of him gave Julian a queer jolt. That was her father. Julian had stopped the little machine before it flashed upon him that Willis would certainly ask him when he saw Lynnie last down in the valley. It was just what he did ask, coming up shading his eyes with his hand. He had no hat on; his curly hair, beginning to be a little grey, was very nice-looking around his attractive forehead. Julian, answering his inquiry with a gulp, was aware that he had never looked at the man before with seeing eyes. He felt very kindly toward him, but somehow most dreadfully uncomfortable as he drove on.

Yet he went out of his way after that to pass the Willis home. He drove past staring so, forgetting where he was, that he let his engine die, and came to a halt almost directly in front of it. Had he ever seen the place before? Of course, he had seen it a great many times. But was it always such a miserable-looking hovel? They couldn't all live in there—they couldn't. It was too small. There wouldn't be room for them. It was clean—clean—clean; and as he looked the front door opened and a trim little woman in a blue print dress came out with mop and pail to scrub the porch and steps. She looked over at him; he started up the Go-devil in haste. That was Lynnie's mother. As he got away he heard her call shrilly to the little boy he had noticed from the side of his eye, the ten-year-old for whom Lynnie's cloak was to be made over, something about "split that kindling." He went on with an added sense of bewilderment. This was where Lynnie lived. This was how she lived. Why hadn't he given her more things, down the valley there? He just simply never thought about it. She wasn't the kind that made you think about it. Oh, God, what sort of a fellow was he—anyhow?

That was the kind of house Lynnie had to live in. That was the best she had ever known.

He put the machine at the steep, little-used street that came out near the back of his own home and stopped it before the big iron gate which opened on a winding brick drive leading to

a stable that belonged to an earlier time when they had kept only a carriage and pair. He looked with new eyes at the great house, its lawns, walks, shrubberies, kept like show grounds. In all these years, living here, he hadn't really got a proper sense of it—so big, so imposing, so amply served! There were four servants on the place: Ishi, the cook; his little wife, Tatsu, who was seamstress and second maid; Miamotu, the house boy, with the chauffeur, and a gardener brought in for extra work.

This was the kind of house he had to live in. Always money in his pocket. Howling around and thinking he was abused, when——

Kamura, the new chauffeur, with his long face and protruding teeth, his empty grin that had no real good-will in it, came running out to open the iron gate when he sounded his horn before it.

"Why you not come front way?" he asked pertly, as he hopped on the running-board to ride up to the garage and take the machine.

Julian, staring at the house, lost in his own feelings at coming back to it, made no answer.

He went in the side way. It was a little entry opposite the garage. His father used it a great deal. The library opened from it, on a level with it, and then a half flight of shallow steps led up to the music-room that was at the back of the house for greater quiet and seclusion. He passed the library door. His father wouldn't be at home at this hour. He stopped a moment and looked into the music-room. There was the concert grand his mother had got for him year before last. Before that an upright piano had been good enough. In the cases beside it were piles of Chopin, Liszt, Grieg, the German classical composers, and the modern Russians. Only half conscious of what he did, he went over and touched the keys with a little tinkle of sound. Kamura, close behind him with the suitcases, stopped to grin in at him as he passed on toward the main hall and stairway. Julian followed up slowly. From the half-open door of his mother's room her voice checked him with,

"Is that you, Julian? You may come in here to speak to me."

He stepped into the spacious, many-windowed apartment, all lavender, cool greys, pale greens, empire furniture and faint scents. She was sitting in front of the triple-mirrored dressing-

table, with her finger-ends dropped in a small enamelled bowl of warm water; his mother, dark, handsome, long-limbed, fine-featured. Tatsu, the little Japanese maid, greeted him with the giggle and duck of a mechanical doll as he passed her to go over and stop near his mother, in silence. She let him stand, while she went on looking at her fingers. It was a trick of hers to keep him so—standing—standing, waiting on a reproof which she had to deliver. To-day the familiarity of her tactics got past him without much recognition. When she finally turned toward him, it was to cry out at the dust that covered him.

"Mercy, don't touch me till you've washed!"

"I wasn't going to," he said.

"I suppose you feel yourself quite a distinguished person—with your picture in the paper?" Before he could make any response to this, her glance went past him, and she said, "Tatsu—I'm ready for you." The Japanese maid came, napkins and manicure implements in hand, and began upon her mistress's finger ends. After that Mrs. McCulloch spoke across the black, shining head of the kneeling worker. "If Dale Pollard expects to please me by a vulgar splurge like that—! I rang her up and told her what I thought of it. I wonder at a woman of her brains."

"I brought the music you asked for," Julian said. "The Peer Gynt suite. I left it on the piano in the music-room."

"Your hands don't look much like playing Grieg," she darted an angry look at the bandaged fingers. "You might remember that I've put thousands of dollars into them, Julian—and take a little care of them."

He made an impatient movement, a mere inarticulate murmur of sound that might have served for protest or apology.

"Where's your ring? You haven't lost it, have you?"

He brought the ring from his pocket, and showed it to her. She gave his face a sharper look, and hesitated.

"You're dreadfully tanned! How red your eyes are!"

"The smoke. Some of them nearly blind."

"The smoke? Oh. Well, you needn't look for me to pay you any compliments on your heroism—doing work that a Japanese laborer could be hired to do. That's your idea—and Dale Pollard's—of what's noble. I call it silly." She freed a hand from Tatsu's manipulations, picked up her lorgnette from the

"AREN'T YOU GOING TO SAY A WORD TO ME, LYNNIE?"
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bureau, and peered at him through it. "What's that you have on? I never saw that sweater."

"I got it while I was at the ranch."

"Where?"

"In—San Pablo."

"Heavens—it looks it! I've always wondered who makes and who buys such things as they have in those horrible little towns. Why couldn't you have sent to Gand and Melendy's if you needed a sweater?"

"I like this one."

"It's a fright. Give it to Kamura."

"Is that all, Mother? May I go now?"

"In a moment. Haven't you been well? or is it the fire fighting? or just the trip?"

"The trip—I guess."

"You think you'll be feeling fit by Friday? You think a week will set you up?"

"Friday?"

"Your birthday. Heavens, Julian, you're a drag, socially! Your birthday luncheon. Ten boys and ten girls—because you're twenty." She glanced at him impatiently. "I don't believe you even care to hear the list."

"Thank you, Mother; I'm perfectly willing to leave it to you."

He turned away. She pushed Tatsu aside, got up and came with him to the door, passed through it and followed along the hall. There was something odd in her manner.

"I want to tell you—before you see it—I've had your room done over."

She looked sidelong at him. Why did she say that—again? It was in her note.

"Have you?" he answered vaguely, and knew that she still watched him obliquely, going with him quite to his door. He stopped there, his hand on the knob.

"It suited you, then," she persisted, "for me to have it done? There was no reason that you wouldn't want me to?"

"Why, no—I suppose not." He tried to remember what they were talking about. "It was very kind. Thank you."

"Julian—look at me! What's the matter with you? Look around here."

Unwillingly he turned his head. She was dressed for some

evening function. The tall, proud-looking woman tinkled and sparkled from head to foot. Her eyes were angry, her lip hard.

"Don't you realise that I've found out——?"

He felt like a sleeper roughly wakened. He jerked the door open.

"Come in," he said, in a swift, low, choked tone. "Tell me in here. What is it? What have you found out?"

She stepped in. He followed close. It was a large room with an open fireplace and wide glass doors at one end opening on a sleeping-porch; handsomely furnished, complete in its details. He paid no attention to the changes that had been made, but stood watching his mother as she moved with a clicking of high heels, and swishing of silk, toward the bureau, twitched the cloth off some things that lay there like a disreputable hoard turned out of a small boy's pocket: a lot of cigarettes he had bought when he was running with the Daggett boys; a pack of greasy cards; a pipe and tobacco; and finally the objects toward which his mother's beringed hand pointed most accusingly—three dog-eared, paper-covered books of the sort that never emerge into the knowledge of book stores, but circulate surreptitiously.

"Oh—is that all?" He went over and stood staring down at them as though he had never seen them. He fingered at arm's length the squalid things, scribbled over fly leaf and margins with the stuff that's glimpsed sometimes on fences or the planking of old sheds, primal muck of the race, such as was no doubt scrawled—word for word—with bits of coloured marl, in alleyways or on barrack walls of Rome and Babylon. "Yes," he said slowly, "they are rotten—filthy—aren't they? Why didn't you just burn them up?"

"Do they belong to you?"

"As much as they do to anybody. Zen Daggett lent me that one. I don't know who gave me the other one—nor who owns this."

"Julian, you don't seem to appreciate this situation. These are—unspeakable things—things you should never have seen. The question is, have—have you read any of them?" She asked it angrily, her very ears red with intense embarrassment.

"Well—I see you did, anyhow." He had no intention of talking back. "I don't care what you do with them. Burn them—and the rest of this stuff if you want to. Is that all?"

"Certainly not. What about the cigarettes? Have you got that habit? After all I've said to you about your lungs—and——"

"No. I smoked a few. I didn't care for it."

"I want you to give me your word that you don't smoke cigarettes."

Silence.

"This is serious. A boy of your age—threatened as you've been with tuberculosis— I want you to give me your word."

"I gave it."

She looked startled at his brevity, hesitated a minute, then slipped two fingers into the fastening of her bodice, brought out the key to the small top drawer of his bureau, unlocked, opened it, reached down among the collars and ties that lay there, and held up a bottle of brown liquid.

"This is laudanum—a deadly drug. Where did you get it?"

"What difference would that make?"

Again his reply, and the tone of it, seemed to startle her.

"What difference?" She raised her voice a little. "There must be four ounces of laudanum here—enough to kill a dozen persons! And you have it hidden in your bureau drawer. What under heaven am I to think?"

He stood and looked at her without a word, taking for almost the first time in all their relations the man's prerogative of silence and mystery.

"What do you expect me to think?" she reiterated.

"I can't help what you think," he said finally, very low. "If I told you the truth, you wouldn't believe me."

"What? What? Well, I'm certainly going to take charge of this." He could see that her anger was more than half fright. And over this thing, for which he cared not a button, he at last made an actual stand against her.

"You'll not take it away from me," he said doggedly. "There's no sense in taking it away from me. Put it back."

She folded her arms over it, and hurried out into the hall. He came after her, reached and caught her wrists.

"Give that back," he said.

"Stop!" she cried. "Stop this instant! You're hurting my fingers. You'll cut them on my rings."

"Heh! What are you two doing?" Stephen McCulloch, com-

ing up, spoke from the stair head. "Hello, Jule. Mrs. M., I thought you didn't approve of the Rag. I'd call that a Bunny-hug."

When his mother let go and they moved apart, the laudanum was in Julian's possession. She kept her back to her husband, and, frowning, shaped with her lips, "You're not going to keep it? Give it to me." But he ignored her, and dropped it into a side pocket as he went forward to shake hands with his father, who greeted him with,

"Well, young fellow, I should say you'd outgrown me. Over six now?"

"A little."

"Gained weight, too," with an estimating glance; "about ten pounds."

"Hit it exactly," Julian found himself answering in a perfectly commonplace tone. "Just ten pounds."

"Julian"—his mother spoke sharply as she went past them—"you'll have to hurry if you want to make yourself fit for the dinner table."

It was not till she had gone into her own room that McCulloch moved toward the door of his son's.

"Got your picture in the paper," he remarked, with a smile, and Julian could see that his father, at least, liked it.

"Yes. The roadster was a lot of use to them; it'll go where most machines can't."

"How'd the old bunch of wheels come out of it?"

"Pretty well." Julian began to relax. In the full light of the room now his father still eyed him keenly, and glanced at the bandaged hand; but when he spoke it was the machine again.

"Climb any trees?"

"A few. Cracked a bearing. How's the new chauffeur? Any good? Could he help me get a new one on?"

"I wouldn't trust the blamed monkey. Take it over to Thatch Dye. I've got my roadster over there now. I don't let this Jap handle it. He's good to wear a uniform, and suck his breath between his teeth and bow. Can't drive for me."

Julian stole a look at his father; of athletic build and good height, though not so tall as himself, beginning to show a touch of middle-aged stoutness, well groomed, well dressed, in a slightly pronounced mode, he was certainly fine looking. Julian waited

as, hands lightly in pockets, his father strolled toward the bureau, and checked with raised eyebrows before what lay there.

"Which one?" he inquired casually, indicating the cigarettes and pipe.

"Neither."

"Oh, well, that's all right, too, at your age." Then, as his eye caught the books, "Huh—they have those things yet! Guess I'd read a barrel of 'em before I was as old as you are. Better keep 'em out of your mother's sight."

The freemasonry of adult manhood was in the grin he gave his son. Julian, abashed, confused, was unable to answer it, or to control the shamed distress that seemed so to offend, as his father hastily glanced away from him, shrugging, and with no more words moved out, whistling a little.

CHAPTER XIII

BEHIND LOCKED DOORS

JULIAN looked back on the three days he had been at home and could make nothing of them. He had quarrelled intermittently with his mother over the possession of that laudanum bottle. He didn't care anything about the stuff; he thought she knew that he didn't; yet that was what they seemed to be quarrelling about. It was the old story—yet not quite the old story.

He had tried to get ready for Monday's lessons: numb—his mind was numb—he couldn't command its attention at all. The sense of pressure in the air, that every one said was the rains coming, seemed part of it. If he began sorting textbooks up in his room, he found himself out on the sleeping-porch looking off toward the hollow. And all he could see in the hollow was the house to which Lynnie would be getting back bye and bye.

That first night at the dinner table his father had spoken again about his work with the fire fighters, and his mother answered as though the whole matter were a disgrace. He hadn't paid much attention, but he noticed enough to see that his father's face reddened; and, since then, he, Julian, had hardly been noticed.

To-day Thatch Dye had been at the house since early after lunch. He came to bring the Go-devil back with its bearing repaired, and seemed to be staying as a visitor. Mrs. McCulloch breakfasted always in bed; to-day she had taken her lunch also upstairs. Now she came into the music-room where the two young fellows sat, looked at them, and just said,

"Oh!"

Julian knew that she believed he was keeping Thatch there with him to stave her off. No doubt she was afraid Thatch expected an invitation to dinner, and that he, Julian, would give such an invitation, or the unwelcome visitor might stay without being asked. Well, he couldn't help any of that. Thatch used

to stay "to meals," as he called it, when he had come up from the ranch, before he was chauffeur for the McCullochs. An hour ago he had proposed an adjournment to the garage; they had gone and tinkered around there and talked autos—and there Thatch's real errand had come out. He wanted to know what Julian thought of his asking Stephen McCulloch to lend him the money he needed. Julian dragged his mind from his own troubles to consider the question. He even promised Thatch that he would speak to his father about it. Still the undesired guest did not leave, but instead followed him back into the music-room. Julian might have thought he had something else on his mind, if he had given the matter much attention.

Every possible subject of conversation seemed exhausted. As Julian sat staring into the fire, brooding, he knew that Thatch watched him uneasily. Miamotu brought in a basket of roses and set it on the stand. The heat of the room brought out their odour. It made Julian vaguely unhappy. After a while his mother came and scolded that the flowers were not in water.

"I wish you'd told me," she said. "You know better—if Motu doesn't. I've got a bit of a headache, and the whole house is to be put to rights for to-morrow."

Thatcher Dye, conscious of being in the way, moved uneasily in his chair, and offered,

"I guess we'll all feel better after the rain comes."

"I suppose so," Julian answered absently, as his mother made no reply. "Could I help you?" he asked her.

"No, thank you," glancing impatiently at the lingerer by the fire. Thatch returned her look, plainly paralysed with the knowledge that she found him in her way; an inability to make a decent exit on such a basis. He got up, went to the window and stood there. Silence in the room behind him until he spoke over his shoulder.

"Rain's comin'—good and plenty."

"I'm afraid you'll be caught in it," Mrs. McCulloch said coldly.

"Oh, I have my slicker," awkwardly.

She was busy sorting the roses, putting them in a great crystal bowl. She made no answer, and Thatch, at the window, spoke again,

"Heh—look at my landlady that used to was, down there hustling to get her washing in before the rain!"

Julian shivered a little and drew closer to the fire.

"Somebody's streaking it over from the Willis place to help her," Thatcher made talk. "Why—ain't that Lynnie?"

Silence. The noises of the coming storm outside. The indefinite small rustlings of Mrs. McCulloch's silken garments as she moved. Then finally,

"I guess it's not Lynnie," Julian said with difficulty. "I don't think she's got back yet."

"Sure it is—and she's not helping get in the wash, neither. She's started up the hill. Watch her scoot!"

Julian took three long strides to the window.

"Where?" he asked. "Where is she?"

In the chill, grey light everything to his eye stood out with unnatural clearness. The trees were beginning to moan a little and swing. The slant of the steep, unpaved street that led up from the dip where the Willises lived made a skyline, and along it, blown by the first gusts of the storm, like a little lost thing driven through the twilight, went a girl's figure. Julian stood there grasping the curtain and staring out at her so that he hardly heard what his mother and Thatcher Dye were saying. First the young fellow looked at Lynnie,

"Gee! she's in a hurry—bareheaded, too. She'd better look out—the rain'll catch her."

Then Mrs. McCulloch's even, cool tones,

"Well, I certainly think the rain will catch you, Thatcher, unless you start at once."

Lynnie went out of sight over the hill. It seemed to Julian his very soul followed her. Back of him there Thatch wheeled angrily. Dimly Julian heard him saying,

"Oh, I getcha at last, Mrs. McCulloch. Been worryin' you all afternoon, ain't it? Well, ye might 've said so sooner. A hint's as good as a kick to a blind mule. I guess I'm the blind mule. Good-bye, Jule."

Julian never looked around. He was staring where that little figure had disappeared. Thatch tramped across and out of the room, down the little half flight of stairs that took him into the side entry; Julian heard him bumping around there, getting his things.

"My goodness, what a relief!" Mrs. McCulloch said. "I thought he never would go. Julian—I want to be done with this matter. Fetch me that bottle from upstairs—at once—and——"

"Wait a minute," Julian interrupted her—an unheard-of thing that made her draw herself up and look at him reprovingly. He paid no attention. He groped vaguely at the idea of getting word to Lynnie. "Wait till I speak to Thatch, mother."

"Speak to Thatch! I suppose you think I've hurt his feelings. I hope I have—at last. People of his sort are very hard to reach. What in the world were you and he talking about all afternoon? Why did you keep him here? I can't have you making a friend of a person like that—practically one of the servants."

For a moment Julian just stood there, hearing all that she said, but making no sense of it. The first clear thought that came up on the tide of confusion was, if she said this of Thatch what would she say if she knew anything about Lynnie?

"I'm going—" he began abruptly, but his mother stopped him with a gesture. She was staring past him to the side window that commanded the wide iron gate and the winding brick drive. When she spoke, her tone had fallen to the odd, drained aloofness that through all these years she had held toward her husband's affairs.

"There's your father. Do you know the man with him?"

Julian turned to look. He swallowed before he spoke.

"I—I think that's Willis."

Mrs. McCulloch seemed momentarily to forget the bottle of laudanum, the offensive Thatcher Dye, Julian's determination to follow and speak to him. The strangeness of her husband's return to the house at this hour was increased by the company he brought with him—a man in overalls, a man with curly light hair beginning to be a little grey, its rings lying sweetly around the small forehead. He was shorter than Stephen McCulloch, and he leaned forward a little as he walked, talking fast, seeming to try to aim his remarks up into McCulloch's face, in the manner of a small dog who runs at the shoulder of a big one yapping. The wind before the storm was driving level now, sending arrowy flights of leaves past the window, between Julian's eyes and the two men. The queer, sunless light that gleamed from the west was full in his face. Suddenly his mother

looked across at him. She put a quick hand on his arm, demanding,

"What is it?"

"Nothing. I don't know."

They could hear heavy steps go around the house, the opening of the side door, men's tones, low, excited, in the entry down there; then Stephen McCulloch's voice, raised to a sort of bellow, roared out suddenly,

"Jule! Jule! Come here."

Without so much as seeing her, he brushed past his mother and stepped into the doorway trembling a little. The shadow of the coming storm made twilight down there. He could just distinguish his father and Willis; past them in the back entry where Thatch stood motionless, one arm half in the slicker he was hunching into, a gleam of light caught on the pool that had dripped from the garment. As he halted there, his father's call came again, rasping, peremptory,

"Jule!" and after it Willis's lighter, half-scared utterance,

"There he is. Now, McCulloch, your boy's got to——"

The concluding words were drowned in a sudden clamour. The small, well-like side entry, lit only by its clerestory windows, had so far got little of the storm without; now a blast of wind suddenly burst open the side entrance and rushed through all the passages and rooms, slamming doors, catching up loose draperies, papers and magazines, while the trees outside threshed their tops over and whistled and swung. Julian heard the bowl of roses go to the floor with a smash. His mother ran past him on the stairs, as though starting up to close her bedroom windows.

For a moment human affairs took second place while the elements held the stage. Yet even as his father heaved his bulk against the door, pushing it shut, as Miamotu scuttled across the entry to the dining-room, as Thatcher shoved his fist through his slicker sleeve and started into the front hall, Julian was conscious of the man Willis down there glaring up at him, and above the racket he heard again that queer, half-scared, half-defiant voice,

"You—you, boy—come down here! I've got something to say to you."

"Hold on a minute!" His father had got the door shut and bolted. He whirled short and looked about him. "Well, in here,

I guess," he jerked out as he walked quickly toward the library.

Willis was right after him. Julian went slowly down the stairs and followed. His father had stopped, barring the way, letting Willis pass him. He took hold of his son and dragged him inside, then shut and locked the door in Thatcher Dye's face. As he went in Julian's one backward glance found his mother on the landing halfway up the main stairway. She must have stopped there—she had been there all the time. In that one glance he seemed to feel his kinship to her; he thought he might have spoken out to her if he had still had the chance; yet it was only such a flicker as precedes the dying out of a hope. Then the door was shut, his father's grip descended on his shoulder, he was whirled around and set facing the two men.

"What's the matter?" he asked finally, when standing there looking at them in silence got too much for him.

There was no answer. His father's shrewd glance was going from one to the other—his son and his employee. His eyes were narrowed and a little bloodshot. Julian had never seen him look like that. He left it to Willis to speak, and finally Willis began, half plaintive, half belligerent,

"It ain't going to do you any good to pretend you don't know. The other day when you came a-past the factory and stopped to speak to me—Lord, butter wouldn't have melted in your mouth—you was too slick for anything! But Mrs. Jordan's at my house now—she's brought the girl up—and the story with her."

Julian made an inarticulate attempt at a word. It came out like a mumble or a groan. Neither man paid any attention.

"Yes," Willis went on heavily, "she had all them—them—underclothes you bought for Lynn. My God! And goin' to the ho-tel and registerin' her as your sister. But I'd 've found it out if Jane Jordan hadn't—I'd 've found it out, anyhow. I'd 've made Lynn tell if I'd had to beat her to death. I——"

"Shut up, Willis." His father's voice was quiet. "You talk like a fool."

"Oh, I talk like a fool—do I?" Willis's tone ran up to a sort of squeak. The rain poured, the storm raved at the windows. But inside, the house was strangely silent, as though every one beyond the library door were hushed, listening.

"Yes—you talk like a fool, because you are one." McCulloch was only impatient. "Get down to cases, can't you?"

Willis began to show rather pitiful, his face oddly streaked with colour, his eyes wild. It flashed on Julian, Lynnie's "Father drinks, sometimes, when he's worried."

"Well," he cried, and the drink he had plainly taken to brace his nerves for the occasion showed in his tones, too, "I'm a man that's got a family. I came up here to-day to——"

"You didn't come to do a lot of talking," McCulloch cut him off. "There's the boy. If he doesn't deny it—I'll do what I said I would."

Julian didn't ask what "it" was. Neither did he inquire what his father had agreed to do supposing "it" to prove true. He stood looking from one to the other, moistening his lips, dragging hard at the very roots of speech—and unable to get out a word. He could see, much more plainly than he saw the two men before him in the library here, that small, wind-swept figure driven before the storm. Lynnie. When Jane Jordan came up from "Restlands" with her—and the story—what had they done to Lynnie? What had they bullied her into saying? What was he now expected to say? No words came.

It seemed a long time that they stood so. His father's policy was evidently to let the others do the talking. Julian saw that Willis was full up with things he might have enjoyed saying, yet could hardly get out in the very midst of the rich man's mansion, confronted by the majestic power of wealth on all sides. He looked around at the bookcases, the handsome, heavy furniture, glanced fleetingly at McCulloch and Julian, and finally began a bit quaveringly on what might have been a speech he had conned for the occasion,

"You rich men think money's all there is to a thing like this. I come of as good folks as you do. My wife's people, back in Lynn, Massachusetts— And I, myself, am related to the—or, anyhow—the poet Willis——"

"See here," McCulloch broke in, "you won't get anywhere with that. If the boy doesn't deny it—I'll pay. And let me tell you mighty few men in my situation would talk that way to you. He hasn't acknowledged it—yet. Get along to that."

"He hasn't acknowledged it—good God Almighty—look at him!" Willis's tone and gesture were meant to be dramatic. McCulloch never glanced at his son. He shrugged a little, as a man who admits having lost a point in a deal.

"All right. We'll say he doesn't deny it. Now let's come to business. He's a minor. You've got to deal with me."

"Well, but he can—he could——" Willis broke off, scared.

"He could what?" McCulloch prompted, after an ominous silence.

But Willis was afraid. He dared not finish what he had begun. Instead, he whined,

"You rich men think your saphead sons can just treat poor girls any way—and get by with it."

"He—could—what?" McCulloch repeated, without any variation of his phrase.

"We're decent folks," Willis still evaded. "Money isn't everything. My girl's been raised right—she's been fetched up strict——"

"Oh—that's what you're getting around to, is it?" McCulloch's tone was low, but the red rushed into his face until it was fairly purple. The veins in his neck swelled. "Say another word like that and I'll blacken your girl's name until the Devil himself wouldn't have her. Behave yourself—and the thing can be hushed up. No son of mine is going to——"

"What is it you want me to do, Mr. Willis?" Julian spoke for the first time since he came into the room. His father wheeled on him, glaring; even Willis seemed not overpleased at the chance to deal direct. "What is it?" Julian repeated.

"You could marry her." It came out halting, fearful, and Willis added half-heartedly, "You could—but would you? Boys don't marry girls they buy that kind of underclothes for. They're not after——"

"I would marry her."

The depth and resonance of the words were startling. McCulloch had never taken his eyes from Julian's face.

"You stay out of this, Jule!" he roared. Willis was plainly more scared than reassured by what he had stirred up.

"I would marry Lynnie," Julian reiterated, a little louder. "I will marry her."

"I—I guess that settles it." Willis looked around him vaguely.

"Settles it?" McCulloch's head had dropped a bit between his shoulders. He rolled it, looking from one to the other with those small, bloodshot eyes. He seemed to stand more lightly

on his feet. "Think you'll work a shot-gun marriage on this poor boob and get a chance at my money, heh, Willis? Forget it. You'll never make it in this world. I'll pitch him out neck and crop if he marries a girl like that."

Willis cowered before the big man's fury. He looked on the floor and shuffled his feet. Then, seemingly in desperation, raised his glance and met that intimidating eye.

"Well," he gulped; and then again, "Well. Who's got the say-so—about this boy—anyhow?"

"What?" McCulloch's glance dared him to go further. And though Willis shook all over, he went.

"From what I hear— Ought to have done as I first intended—gone to the madam with it. She's the one——"

"What?"

"Gosh darn it, McCulloch! You needn't to beller at me like that. Everybody in town knows that you ain't got the control of your son. I ought to have gone to her. Everybody's always known that if there was anything to settle, it was her for it; you daresn't to lay a hand on him. You——"

"Daresn't——"

The word was a savage snarl. To Julian, standing with his back against the door, looking from one to the other, hearing all as one in a dream or a delirium, it seemed that the world had gone mad, when his father lunged, clutched him by the collar, dragged him unresisting forward, reached back for the heavy walking cane he had carried when he came in from outside, missed it, stood a moment clutching for it blindly, shaking him until his teeth rattled, staring into his face with gnashing, animal rage. Then the right hand came forward, a fist, and drove a crashing blow, a short-arm jab, yet with force enough behind it to fling Julian out of his father's hold and against the panels of the door with a thud.

As he hung there a moment, half stunned, he heard the stir in the hall where his mother and Thatcher Dye were. The next instant his father had caught breath again, leaped at him, and was dragging him around the room, beating him mercilessly.

Even in that whirling chaos he saw that Willis, open-mouthed, backed silently into a corner away from their threshing, struggling figures. Above the din there came to him again and again his mother's scream. That must be Thatch kicking on the locked

door. Then through a horror of blinding blows, Julian finally heard Willis choke out,

"My God, McCulloch—you'll kill him!" And after a minute more, "Stop that! Stop that!"

Crash! Thatch's heavy boots threatened to split the panels. And now he began to shout,

"Open this door, Steve McCulloch! Open it—or I'll break it down! By God, I'll get the police!"

"Julian—Julian—Julian!" the gasping screech kept up from the stairway. "My child! They're killing my child in there!"

With a final jerk and blow McCulloch pitched his son from him. There was a moment of half unconsciousness. When Julian again sensed things, the door was open; he had a glimpse of Thatch in it, his mother's face, white and distraught, beyond. Thatch came running to him, swearing as he came.

"You great big damn' brute! It's a good thing for you you locked that door." Then as Julian raised his head, dazed, and looked about him uncertainly, "How they coming for you, Jule?"

"I—I'm all right."

Julian looked past Thatch, who bent over to help him, to where his mother still halted, staring at her husband with the face of one who has seen the house-dog on the hearth change into a wolf—a dangerous wild beast. As she turned and came away, glancing back with eyes in which bewilderment strove with anger, he caught fragmentary words,

"A murderous attack . . . Act the ruffian!" Then she jarred him all through, trying to push Thatch away and get hold of him herself, ordering Dye fiercely, "Let my son alone. Take your hands off him. What are you here for, anyhow?"

"Well—I'll be jiggered!" Thatch gave back a little. "Why, say—I was only trying to— If it hadn't been for me——"

Mrs. McCulloch spoke in a low tone, to her husband this time,

"How dared you strike my son? How dared you beat him like a great bully?"

"Your son," McCulloch grunted. He stood puffing a little, settling his clothes, glancing ominously about him. "All right; if you want to claim him now—take him."

Julian had dragged himself up by the leg of the heavy library table. He swayed there clinging to its edge, shaking all over, cringing as a whipped dog cringes and shakes. His plight was

almost purely physical, and not so bad but that he could make an effort to pull himself together and put a commonplace face on the situation.

"I'm all right, thank you, Thatch," he gasped, speaking again to Dye.

"Julian," demanded his mother, "what does this mean? Why did your father——?"

She brushed falteringly at his dusty sleeve; her eyes winced. Poor little Willis was looking wistfully for a way to get out.

"It's a girl scrape, Antoinette," said McCulloch brutally. "Guess you'll wish you hadn't put your nib in."

"A—a——" She drew back, reddening. Her hands dropped to her sides. She looked about her, uncomfortable, ashamed. "I——" she began, broke off, then—as such a woman must at such a time—appealed to the head of the house. "Stephen"—she spoke the name coldly, as though it were bitter in her mouth—"can't you turn these men out of here? Haven't you the decency to keep these affairs to ourselves?"

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" Thatcher Dye stood where he was, feet still a little wide, and stared.

"You shouldn't have waited to be told to go," she said to him, cuttingly. "But I suppose you knew that there was something——"

"Oh—say." Thatch's tone was remonstrant. "I guess there's a rule against interfering in family rows. I guess I broke it, all right—and I don't care if I did. Neither one of you is fit to have a boy like Jule—or any other kind of a boy, for that matter—or a girl, either."

He let this comprehensive statement of their parental unfitness stand for a moment while Julian started to put forward a hand toward him, found his right bleeding, shifted his weight on the table to it, and offered a trembling left.

"All right," Thatch repeated, in a good loud voice, as he took and shook the offered hand. "I'm going to walk myself out of your house now—and never walk myself into it again. But if you take a notion to beat Jule up that way another time, Steve McCulloch—he knows where I am. Don't you, Jule?"

Julian just nodded, silently.

"I'll go with you, Dye." Willis's face was still mottled with

terror. "I came here to-day with the best intentions—and now look—— But the law——"

"Hold on!"

Suddenly, as though that word "law" had been magic, Julian saw his parents swing in so that they stood shoulder to shoulder, his mother's hand on his father's arm, shaking it promptingly. Their backs were turned to him as though he had been a foundered horse.

"Hold on," the master of the house repeated; "I've got a word to say to you yet, Willis. You don't want to go to law—any more than we do. We can settle this. Keep things quiet down at your house, if you have to wring your wife's neck to stop her talking. Send that Jordan woman to me—at the office. No son of mine is going to be married off to that kind of a girl at nineteen—just because he's made a damn' fool of himself—or she's made a damn' fool of him. And the thing's got to be kept quiet."

Willis nodded. He made no effort to resent McCulloch's "that kind of a girl," but sullenly pushed on to join Thatch, who waited for him in the entry.

"Dye," McCulloch's voice followed him, "you don't want to do any talking about what you've seen here to-day."

"Go to hell!" Julian heard Thatcher's hearty answer, saw him pick up his hat from the entry floor and follow Willis.

"He won't say anything. You know he won't," he spoke low to his father. "Good-bye, Thatch," he called to where Dye and Willis stopped, drawing the bolts that Stephen McCulloch had pulled in place against the storm.

The men went out into the rain. He was alone with two angry, hostile strangers whose intentions toward him he could not guess.

CHAPTER XIV

WHAT NOW?

THE rug there at his feet lay all wrinkled up. Dully he traced with his eye the little repeated, dim-blue figure that was cut off by the fold. Mechanically he stirred a leaden foot to flatten it. And suddenly his consciousness welled out, took in the whole house—the servants listening, or moving about back there—himself standing silent between his silent parents. His glance got no higher than his mother's knees; he knew how she would be looking at him. He located his father out of the corner of his lowered eye, lurched between them to the door, made his way across the entry, and began crawling, a step at a time, up the stairs, clinging to the banisters. He had a definite objective. He knew of something up there that he wanted. On the landing, where he had seen his mother stand, his breath gave out. As he hung there, fighting for strength to get on, words came to him from the two down in the hallway—quarrelling. First his mother's tones, low, bitter:

"——Oughtn't to have lived under the same roof with you. —Might have known you wouldn't keep your bargain."

"How do you make that out? Let *you* alone, haven't I? Ever come whining after you since you threw me down?"

"Oh—Stephen!" as though he had struck her.

"Well—the boy, then. For God's sake, what did I ever do to him? You've had your way with the poor fish. I ever interfere—before? Nah—I've been the goat. Y' heard Willis bawl me out. And at that he told the truth. . . . Whole town knows it. . . . Wanted to bend a man's face in, more'n once, for the way he kept off the subject with me."

"Well, there are ways——" That was his mother. Again his father, harsh, deriding, mimicking,

" 'Ways'—and you've had your way. Got things into a fix that scares you pie-eyed. You're no good—at this. Am I going to 'tend to it—or—am I not?"

"Don't speak so loud, Stephen. You are."

He was at his own bedroom door now; he clung to the knob, fighting to hold consciousness, to control the nausea that made him faint, the trembling that went over him in gusts. It seemed to him, when he shook so, that the entire house shook. The voices down there wavered, louder and lower. If he could just get inside his room, and across to the bureau . . .

The last quarter of that progress was taken blindly. The storm met him when he opened the door. In the confusion his room had been overlooked. Through the French windows that gave on the sleeping-porch the gale rushed in, tearing at everything loose. He barely noticed it, and once secure from pursuit he lurched over toward his bureau, caught at the handle of the drawer, unlocked it, jerked it open, thrust down a right hand that left a bloody smear on a coil of white collars, and felt about for the bottle of laudanum.

Somehow it was like coming to the end of a lane he had travelled before. This was why he had stolen the drug in the first place. This was why he had kept up what seemed to him a senseless quarrel with his mother over its possession. His finger ends found it, chased it for a moment, caught and gripped it, and he brought it into view unsteadily, fumbled at the cork, got it open and raised it to his mouth. In the instant of success one of those gusts of trembling racked him, jerked the bottle about till the liquid in it splashed. He felt himself settling slowly down. He knew at last that he lay crumpled on the floor—still clutching the bottle—for he could feel it spilling over his hand. Then the qualm—the awful blackness . . .

He heard the small, mellow din of surf on the little beach at Smuggler's Cove; roused slightly; no, that was the gong for dinner, sounding in with the rush of the storm. His name was spoken. That sickly odour—the darkness . . . Oh, it was the beach apple he smelled. The wheel of the Go-devil was under his hands. . . . That must be Lynnie calling,

"Julian! Julian!"

Rattle and whistling of the gale on the windows; he knew he was lying in front of his own bureau in the house at Las Reudas, that it was the spilled laudanum he smelled, and that his mother was shaking his door and calling him in cautiously lowered tones.

He didn't answer. Why should he? Why should he ever speak again?

"Julian! Julian!"

He stirred where he lay. She caught the sound, slight as it was, for he heard her "Oh, dear God!" then the repetition of his name, "Julian, open this door. Give me that——"

Yes, he knew what it was she wanted. Languidly he lifted the bottle to look at it. All gone. Why, she was crying out there. He spoke without any particular volition of his own.

"It isn't—here. I haven't—got it—any more."

"Oh!" A long moment of silence, little rustlings, then she spoke in a more ordinary tone, "Dinner's on the table. Your father's already gone down." She waited after that, but he saw no reason to reply.

"Julian"—her words began to have an edge of impatience—"do you hear me? What's the noise in there? Have you got a window open? I can't have the servants thinking——"

"I don't want any dinner." His voice, raised, monotonous, sounded strange in his own ears. Something about it sent his mother away without him, but she lingered long enough to say querulously, "Well, shut that window—or whatever it is. You'll have the music-room ceiling all drenched."

After she was gone he went over—stepping on the rain-soaked carpet—and closed the glass doors, snapped off the lights, threw himself across the foot of his bed and lay there trying to think.

The door was locked, there was no light, the storm shut him in with a more desperate aloneness; and yet he hid his bruised face against the bed-spread with a shrinking even from himself. Now at last when they had beaten him and cursed him—and the gate of death had failed to open to him—he was held squarely to the point where he must do that which he had evaded all summer: he must think—he must face his own actions. What had he done—what had he done!

The pain of his bruises, though now he throbbed and ached all through his wrenched body, seemed to have little to do with his suffering. As he lay there he could not even spare from thought of Lynnie a moment of curiosity as to the exact why of his father's fury, his mother's agony of repulsion for the situation. It didn't matter what they thought, or felt, or did. He was past that. Past any notion of suicide, too. He saw now

the cowardice of his trying to get away from a world that was out after him—running like a whipped dog—leaving all the row to Lynnie. That's what it amounted to. If his father beat him like that, how were the Willises treating Lynnie? In the light of what had happened down there in the library, her crying for Tony De Vega seemed not to mean so very much: she was still his responsibility. At the bottom of his heart there was the primitive feeling that she belonged to him. She herself might refuse him; but these others shouldn't deny her to him; it was none of their business; it was between himself and Lynnie. To her he'd answer—not to them.

"I must get out of this!" he muttered to himself in the dark, with no clear idea of what he meant. Here was his own individuality at last beginning to assert itself through blind confusion, like a voice heard fitfully above the wind. He didn't see just what it was going to lead to; but it offered brave counsel amid the tumult.

Lying so still he could hear the noises of the house; sounds from the dining-room; then his mother and father leaving it; the to-and-fro of feet as Ishi cleared the table; the clatter of the washing up in the kitchen, the subdued hum of conversation from the library, just beneath. They were talking about him. After a while they came upstairs. His mother must have been ahead, for he heard his father adjusting the night latch even as her little rustling tap fell on his bedroom door. His father's feet were coming heavily up the stair.

"Julian! Julian! Are you awake?"

"Let him alone," McCulloch's tone cut in harshly.

"I just wanted to be sure he was all right," Mrs. McCulloch answered; and her son wondered at her subdued note.

The footsteps went on; Mrs. McCulloch's light, tap-tapping step to the great front chamber, McCulloch's stronger tread to the third floor.

Late in the night Julian got up, felt his way across the room, and let himself out onto the sleeping-porch. He laid a hand on the cot. It was sopping wet. The chair—the bedside table—all drenched. Over by the parapet he knelt, crossed his arms on it, and stared into the darkness. The rain was done, but he got the wind upon his hot, stiff face. The slap of a few last drops blown from the eaves, or from the rustling foliage of the trees, made

the cut throb; yet he liked it. He strained his eyes toward the hollow back of the house. No light down there. Well—till morning, then.

"I can get out of here, anyhow—hunt up something for myself," he was muttering while he went back inside, groped over to the switch and looked about him at the familiar objects of his room which leaped into sudden life when the lights went on, as though he had never seen them before. He opened his closet door. His winter things were all there; they had been brought down from the store-room, unpacked, pressed, and hung ready. He began choosing out clothes, tossing them on the bed.

Where was the sweater he had bought in San Pablo, and worn home here? He couldn't find it, though he went through the piles on the bed again and again. No, it wasn't there. Ransacking once more the stuff he had left in the closet, he found on the top shelf, where Miamotu must have put them, the books, cards and cigarettes his mother had confronted him with on his homecoming. He reached them down, pitched them into the open fireplace, and set a match to them. They blazed there for a moment and then lay charring half heartedly and smoking.

When everything was laid out ready he unlocked his door and went to the third floor for suitcases and trunk. For the first time within his memory he made no effort to move softly so that his mother might not hear him go up there. But she must have been asleep when he brought down his trunk; it was only after the second trip, for the two suitcases, that he heard her foot in the hall, and he was hardly across the room when she was at his door, pushing it open, coming in. Stooping by the piled-up bed, beside the yawning trunk, with his back to her, he looked at her reflected in his bureau glass. She was still the fashionable, artificial woman in her grey kimono, heavy with silver embroidery, the cables of her dark hair falling on each side of her pale, handsome face. It was she who spoke first.

"What were you doing—up there?"

"You can see."

"Is he awake?" Then with a scornful movement of the hands, "Of course not. He'd sleep through anything."

"Excuse me—mother," Julian went on with his work. He could guess how angry it made her. She waited a moment, then burst out,

"I suppose all this rushing around and packing up in the middle of the night means that you think you are going back to the ranch? I don't see how you can concern yourself with such things. Julian—I haven't slept a wink. Why don't you speak? Why don't you show some feeling? I never suffered in all my life as I have this night!"

For a long time Julian found nothing to do but bend, silently fumbling with the folding of shirts and trousers and coats, the straightening out of ties. He thought he wouldn't try to answer her. He held back as long as he could. But at last the limit of endurance was reached. Without turning, he choked out,

"Do you think what's happened hasn't hurt me enough? Do you suppose I'd have done—what I have—if I'd known?"

"Known?" Now she'd nagged him into speaking, she didn't like what he said. She couldn't look him in the face. Red, angry, embarrassed, she hurried on, "You know well enough that what you did was wrong. Of course you knew—or why did you hide it? Those—those boys you were with when you got drunk —those wretched books—surely there wasn't anything left for you to learn after that."

"See here, mother." He felt himself flushing, but his jaw squared itself; he'd be man enough now to say his say. "You wouldn't keep Calkins as a tutor if you didn't know he was thorough in his work. You changed music teachers because you said Hacker wanted to give me pieces before he'd laid the foundation for it—do you remember that?"

"Oh, Julian! What difference does it make about your music lessons—in the face of a thing like this?"

"Hold on. I'm coming to something." He took her by the arm and led her across to the hearth where the books smouldered. "There they are," he said grimly. "A week ago you talked as though I hadn't any business ever to have seen such things. Just now you spoke of my learning something from them. It's the same way about the gang I got drunk with; you wouldn't let me go to Alaska because I'd been with them. Now you seem to feel as though they knew more than I did—I might have got valuable information from them—something that I needed to let me know right from wrong. What do you mean by it? Oh, well, you always acted the same way about any-

thing that concerned—that." His gesture toward the books on the hearth was inclusive. "I wanted to know. I suppose all children do. And when I'd come to you, you were scared and insulted—just as you are now."

He stood away from her and looked at her averted profile in sullen silence for a moment, trying to fathom the injustice done him. Here was the mother who had left him hopefully to get his knowledge of life from the gutter, from any source, however polluted, so that it was out of sight. Shrinking from his eyes, his questions, her glance caught the broken laudanum bottle and the brown stain on the bureau rug. She was across the room in an instant.

"Julian—you've been taking this!" Her hand was at her lips, muffling the words. "What shall I do? You told me you didn't have it in here."

"I didn't get any. It's spilled there—every drop."

"You were trying to take—you were going to! And a minute ago you pretended not to know that you'd done anything wrong. You stand there with your back to me! What have you to say?"

Without a word, he turned slowly. And now she looked full at him, saw his cheek cut to the bone, swollen and discoloured, the dried blood on it and on his right hand, where the wound from his burn had been torn open.

"Mercy!" she cried. "I didn't know your face was like that. It ought to be attended to. Is it very painful?"

"I forgot about it." He looked at her a moment before he added, "I'll wash it—as soon as you're gone."

"It's got to be properly dressed." She hesitated toward him, her own face twisting with distaste. "Why, that's an awful cut! You ought to have told—— It'll make an ugly scar, if it isn't looked after."

He met and held her off with that wounded hand; he couldn't help staring at her curiously.

"Mother," pushing her gently toward the door, "I think you'd better go back to bed. I'll take care of myself—some way."

And she went.

CHAPTER XV

AFTER THE STORM

SOMETIME in the night—Julian never knew when—the storm quieted down, died out. The world was very still when he noticed the electrics looking redder, glanced around and found the windows taking on a pallid, greenish grey. His watch told him it was nearly five.

Everything that he was going to take with him out of the house, everything that he felt really belonged to him, was packed.

The imported grand piano downstairs had been a birthday present. Yet it, like the musical skill in his fingers, had been thrust upon him unasked, undesired. It, and the two cabinets full of music, with his name written on the first sheet of each piece—from to-day they had no owner. The books in the bookcases over there were none of his buying, though "Julian McCulloch" was set plainly on each fly leaf, and on the inside front cover was the book plate his mother had had designed for him when he was twelve. It followed that if they were not of his buying, his choosing, they were not his.

Anything that he felt he really owned, yet did not wish to take with him, had been burned, additions made to the heap in the fireplace, and now there was a queer-shaped mound of lumpy ashes there. He stepped again through the French windows, out upon the drenched floor beside the soaking cot. He remembered Lynnie's saying that her mother made them all get up at daybreak—how strangely the beauty and peace of the stolen days when she had told him came back in the dismal dawning of this. Across the treetops, there, in the ghastly greyness just before dawn, the hollow and everything in it seemed a dream, a mystery. There was the house, but about it no sign of life or movement. No use going yet. It was still too early for any chance of seeing her.

With the restlessness of misery he must do something while

he waited. There was the trunk to carry downstairs and out to the garage. He'd lash it on the Go-devil, and come back for his suitcases.

Yet, when he had got downstairs quietly, in spite of the bumping trunk on his shoulder, and let himself out into the brick-paved carriage porch at the side, he didn't cross to the garage as he had intended. He set the trunk down in the entry, came back and stood there quite a while looking about him.

Everything was wet. The garden was choking with rain. Along the borders of the drive the shallow stone gutters were full of rose pink and pigeon's blood red berries threshed from the pepper trees. The runnels of water had piled them in heaps, along with fernlike leaves and small twigs. On a sudden impulse, he went down the drive and through the iron gate. Every branch that was touched dropped a great weeping discharge of water. The hollow was shut up, sound asleep. The garbage dump, the nameless street, Daggett's Grocery with empty boxes outside where the displays of wilted vegetables were made, a prowling cat slipping in at a cellar window at sound of his footsteps—it all looked even more squalid than usual.

There was the Petty place where Thatch had boarded. Beyond it the Willis gate was primly shut—almost the only one in the neighbourhood that wasn't half off its hinges. Julian opened it, went through, and stood in front of the house a few minutes, then circled around and looked at the kitchen windows. Nobody up. He might as well go back and lash that luggage on his machine.

Up at the house again, carrying out his trunk, letting himself into the garage, finding a rope, doing the lashing, hearing Kamura's loud snores from the chauffeur's room there, he used up as much time as he could. When he walked again in the squalid street whose name he had never known, it was broad day; a man was taking down the Daggett shutters; a little boy was coming out of the Willis gate, a child who looked ahead apprehensively at him—stared with Lynnie's eyes, very much frightened, evidently knowing well who he was, and with half a mind to turn and run.

"Wait a minute." Julian tried hard to think of the child's name. He had heard Lynnie use it. He'd known it, yesterday; but now it wouldn't come. "Wait a minute," he repeated, and

then asked in a lower tone, bending close to make the inquiry, "Is your sister Lynnie at home?"

"Yes, sir."

What made the child stare in that fascinated way? Oh, it must be the hurt face. There was a nickel clutched tight in the small hand.

"Well, you go in and tell her to come here a minute—that I want to speak to her."

The little boy shook his head and seemed about to cry.

"I—I can't," he protested. "I've got to go to the grocery—for mother."

"When you come back, then," Julian's hand was on the little threadbare shoulder. "I'll give you a dollar if you'll tell Lynnie —when you come back."

At that the little boy abandoned all idea of his errand, wheeled and ran, refusing the bribe but shouting as he went,

"Lynnie! Oh, sister Lynnie—come here. There's somebody——"

He stumbled on the steps, fell and began to cry. Julian had followed as far as the gate. He stopped outside it. The door above opened, and there was Lynnie's mother, a pretty woman still, with her pink-and-white New England complexion, and the narrowed New England mouth.

"What—?" she was beginning, but the little boy sat on the step and cried,

"He wants to see Lynnie!" The woman shut her mouth tighter and gazed at Julian. "He offered me a dollar to tell her to come—but I didn't take it."

Mrs. Willis came out.

"Charley!" she screamed, as her husband, a nightshirt tucked into his trousers, a pair of carpet slippers on his bare feet, appeared in the door. "Stop Lynn from coming out here! Stop her, I tell you! The McCulloch boy's here!"

Willis shrank where he stood. He opened his mouth—but no sounds came. Past him brushed Mrs. Jordan, fully dressed, a gingham apron belted on. She set her hands on her hips and looked about her severely. Julian was conscious of two other children—one still in night clothes, the other partly dressed.

Then he forgot them all; back of her father's shoulder he caught sight of Lynnie looking out at him. He opened the gate

and went in. For a moment she stared, her eyes dilating, at his hurt face. Then she too came through the door, stumblingly, her hands clutching at one another, looking only at him. They met halfway up the walk. She spoke as though they had been alone:

"What—when—how did that happen?"

"I hurt it on the corner of the table. . . . In the library. . . . Yesterday." Julian also made his explanation mechanically, as though there were no one present but their two selves. "Lynnie, I came to ask——"

"Well, you'll not ask anything," Mrs. Willis addressed him. "Of all the impudence! Go back in the house, Lynn. Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" She came down and jerked Lynnie by the arm.

"Eunice, you don't need to——" Charley Willis was beginning, but he never finished. With squabbling and ejaculating, with pushing and pulling, somehow they all got through the Willis hall and into the Willis kitchen. Julian followed them in—though plainly nobody wanted him.

Nobody wanted him there, not even Lynnie. As soon as her mother let go of her she dropped into a chair. He didn't know at the minute he was seeing anything but her little, averted figure. Afterward he remembered the clean, naked poverty of the room, all dim with the reek from a small kerosene cook-stove, at which Mrs. Willis pounced, then wheeled around with her shrill,

"For the dear goodness' sake! Ain't you got a bit of sense? Who left this this way?"

"I did, Mommie." Lynnie spoke to her mother at once—she wouldn't answer him. "I was setting the table, and——"

Her voice fainted out; Julian saw where the oilcloth covered table had coarse, clean dishes and things laid out on it. Mrs. Willis had turned her attention to his own face now. She stood in front of him, looking directly at it, crying,

"For mercy's sake!"

"I told you," Willis said.

"Good land!" Jane Jordan came a little closer. "I didn't suppose it was as bad as that."

It was a crazy kind of business—the whole lot of them looking at one another, then at him, and not saying what they wanted to say. Why didn't they speak right out? He was

surprised to see their embarrassment. Finally little Mrs. Willis —she had courage and snap like a terrier—came at him with,

"What were you hanging around this house for, offering Bertie money?"

"I wanted to see Lynnie."

"Well, you can't—I should think you'd know that."

"Let him see her—now he's here——" Jane Jordan began.

"Shut up—this ain't your row."

Willis, stone cold sober this morning, and desperately in need of a drink to steady his jumping nerves, put a hand on the shoulder of his little termagant wife, with,

"Ma, ma, how you do speak—to Mis' Jordan, that's done so much for us!" This encouraged the Jordan woman to shoulder in,

"I suppose," (Julian had no experience of police matrons, yet he knew this was the police matron manner,) "I suppose you don't deny the gift of that underwear?"

She waited for reply and got none.

"Well, I know what such stuff means. I've searched too many girls brought in off the street, before I put 'em in a cell —with pink silk stuff like that. No decent girl's got any use for that kind of clothes. As soon as I——"

"Bertie!" cried Mrs. Willis, (that was the little boy's name; Julian remembered it when he heard the mother speak it,) "Bertie, go right out of this room. Go in the bedroom and stay there."

Bertie went as far as the door and stayed there, instead, his little nightgowned sister hanging close beside him, both looking in, listening, with eyes like saucers.

"As soon as I caught sight of that stuff," Jane Jordan held on, "I went through Lynn's trunk; and I dug out of Siloam with her quick. But 'twasn't till I got her to San Pablo that a friend of mine on the police force went with me and we found where you'd registered at the San Pablo House with—sister—*Sister!*—the night she lied to me and said she was staying at Alma Bruckner's grandmother's."

Back over Julian's mind came the struggle of that night. He'd won through it honourably—for this! He looked past the Jordan woman and spoke to Lynnie again.

"Aren't you going to say a word to me, Lynnie?" he pleaded.

She never raised her head.

"No, she isn't." Mrs. Willis got in between them. She looked at Lynnie, then at him, and suddenly began to breathe in little short gasps, throwing her arms around, crying out, "Oh! Oh! Oh! that such a thing should have happened to a child of mine! I'd rather she'd have died. Any mother would. We'll never be able to hold up our heads to go back to Lynn, Massachusetts, again!"

Julian was desperate. These people seemed able to carry on a scene like this for any length of time. They stood around in a kind of enjoying way, despite Willis's tremors and Mrs. Willis's tears. He wasn't getting anywhere with this.

"Now, Eunice—now, Eunice," Willis put an arm around his wife, and she sobbed, turning to him, hiding her face against him.

"Oh, Charley, I'd rather have seen a child of mine in her coffin! I could have laid her out, and never shed a tear. But this——"

"Good morning!"

Sudden silence fell on the shameful racket. Julian turned to see his father in the kitchen door. He had pushed it open unheard, and now stood there, cool, perfectly groomed and dressed. Mrs. Willis swallowed her sobs, drew away from her husband, and began nervously pulling down the folds of her blouse. Jane Jordan sustained his eye for a moment, and then hastily picked up the three-year-old Willis girl from the floor, mumbled something about her being out of bed barefoot, and ran. Charley Willis cringed, as though suddenly conscious of his grotesque garb, before the rich man's neat, careful dressing.

"I—we——" he began, and broke down helplessly into, "How do you do?"

Julian's father stepped into the room and stood beside him in silence. The others squirmed, though Mrs. Willis still kept in front of her daughter. All at once Julian felt the pressure of his father's fingers on his shoulder.

"I want to speak to Lynnie; that's what I came here for," he hung pertinaciously to his demand.

It was queer the way the Willises all looked abjectly to Stephen McCulloch for the word on that. He glanced at Julian, then spoke very definitely and quietly.

"I don't see why you shouldn't." To Willis—ignoring the wife—he said, "Could you have the little girl up at my house about ten o'clock? Jule and I are going back there now—for breakfast. Ten o'clock. If there's any change in the hour I'll let you know. Come, Jule."

The fingers tightened on Julian's shoulder. Trying—vainly—to the last to get a glimpse of Lynnie, he found himself out on the street with his father. It came to him with a shock that this was the first time in his life he had ever so walked.

They went the length of the street in silence. They came to the steep way that led up by the McCulloch place. Julian was aware of his father glancing at him sidewise several times before he said in an offhand manner, speaking as one addresses an equal, man to man,

"Think you made a mistake, Jule, to go down there this morning, trying to deal with those people yourself. Eat you up blood raw. Better let me stand for you."

"I don't know," Julian said heavily. "It seemed to me they were more scared than I was. I never thought of stirring them all up. I just went there to——"

"Of course. Of course," his father hurried in. "I understand. But, after all, it's not wise for a boy of your age to try to deal with such people. I think I can handle them for you. Willis was a drink ahead yesterday. He won't talk about going to law—to-day. I want to give them time to get onto themselves. They're the sort that always play the crazy fool and spill the beans at first. I'm not done with 'em. Shut that Jordan woman's mouth easily enough; offer her the place she wants. Got pull enough with the Police Commission to get it for her. Never was anything yet so bad but what it might be worse."

"Yes, sir."

As they stepped easily along shoulder to shoulder, Julian was still conscious of his father's sidelong scrutiny. Finally, just at the gate of home,

"Made a bum job of that plaster, Jule," he said. There was no apology for the wound. Julian didn't want any. But his father added the friendly, man-fashion offer, "Come on to my quarters when we get in the house and I'll fix you up right."

They mounted the stairs together. Julian thought for a moment, just after they passed his mother's door, that his father

was going to say something; but he went on without speaking. It was not till they were on the third floor, and he had deftly cut strips of rubber plaster, drawn water from the tap, and was sponging the cut in a thoroughly workmanlike manner that he said,

"Your mother seems to be sleeping this morning. I think it's likely she didn't get much rest last night. Oh, well—women always have nerves."

Julian glanced vaguely about him as his father worked. They were in the little gymnasium, with its vaulting horse, its parallel bars and swinging rings, its punching bag with the gloves hanging.

"There, now you look as if you'd taken the count from—— How did you get that, Jule?"

"On the corner of the library table."

"It ought to have been looked after sooner."

"I didn't know I had it till—till mother spoke to me about it. She seemed to think it was—she was afraid it would make a scar."

"Oh—of course," his father threw that off so lightly that the tone was hardly contemptuous. "It sure will—one you'll never get rid of." He looked keenly at Julian and waited for him to say something. In answer to the glance Julian returned mechanically,

"I don't care—it's no difference."

"That's right," in a relieved tone. "Might improve your appearance. You come mighty near being too pretty. Your mother kept curls on you till I——"

He finished with a gesture, left Julian sitting relaxed in his chair, and went over to the window to look out. Julian stared at his portly, trim figure against the light. The day outside was beginning to be very gay and smiling. After the storm a little tossing wind was shaking up the branches; everywhere the sun glittered on flying drops like diamonds.

"Ho-hum!" McCulloch turned, came back, regarded his handiwork on Julian's cheek with fingers thrust in his pockets, and said at length,

"Suppose we go down and take breakfast? I could phone to the kitchen and have Ishi get it for us in about three shakes."

Julian looked at him helplessly. If it had been his mother

he wouldn't have said a word, but this sort of treatment invited some adequate return.

"I suppose I ought to tell you, sir," he began, with an effort, "I packed up everything that belongs to me—my clothes, I mean—last night. I'm going to——"

"Say, Son—let's leave all that till after we eat," McCulloch stopped him. "Even then, mightn't it as well wait till we've—till you've seen the girl, and got her point of view?"

Julian eyed him curiously. What did he really mean?

"Well," he said, slowly.

He got up and stood while his father took down the house telephone and ordered bacon and eggs.

"Boiled or fried, Jule? Hard or soft?"

He made answer and began cruising restlessly around the apartment, looking out of windows, taking up things and putting them down.

"That's right—make yourself at home," McCulloch spoke from the phone. "Go on in the front room there, Jule. You'll find a copy of the *Motor News* on my table, by the bed. There's an advertisement of a new machine that some company in Indianapolis is making that's got no gears to shift. Have a look at it."

Julian went on in. He took up the magazine mechanically and sat with it in his hand. He found the page and looked at it, making no sense of the words. He was dimly aware of being upstairs in his father's quarters; a suit of odd green and yellow striped pajamas on the bed-foot held his eye a moment; that was his father 'phoning still. He heard him say,

"Here all right—with me—upstairs." Then, "Oh, piffle!" and the receiver was hung up.

CHAPTER XVI

CONTENTION THEREWITH

JULIAN came to himself standing at a window up in his father's room, looking out into the side yard; at the back the attic cut the third floor off from any view in that direction. He glanced around; his father, pacing the room, was looking at him so keenly that it was embarrassing. The ringing of the 'phone was a relief to both. His father crossed to it and listened, then turned to announce carelessly,

"Ishi says our breakfast's on."

When they got to the head of the stairs, there below was his mother—in delicate, trailing morning dress, early as it was—just coming out of his door. It gave him a hot flash to think she had been in there inspecting things in his absence. She looked startled and angry, as though the sight of him walking along by his father offended her sense of the appropriate—of the dramatic—the sentimental. Of course it would.

"Julian," she questioned sharply, "what am I to understand by your trunk being removed?"

"Now, Nettie," his father spoke up very quickly. "No cutting in."

"You know about the trunk, then, do you?"

"E-er-umph. For God's sake, wait till after breakfast. Let us eat in peace."

"Breakfast!" She turned and walked with them. "Oh—is that where you're going?"

Julian felt his father's hand shoving him not unkindly along. They moved past her. Over a shoulder McCulloch spoke,

"Certainly. Breakfast. Julian's hungry. So am I. If you don't want anything—don't come down, Nettie."

"I'm going with you."

"I didn't order for you. Wouldn't you better have a tray in your room as usual?"

"No. I'm going with you."

All the silent way down the wide, padded stairs, hurrying mechanically to open the door for his mother, drawing back to let her pass, Julian was remembering something he didn't know at the time that he had seen—the little, hot Willis kitchen; its smoking stove, clean-scrubbed sink, and oilcloth-covered table primly set. You could have lost it in one corner of this great, quiet dining-room. It wasn't much bigger than the breakfast alcove over there in the semicircular sweep of the oriel window where the places were laid for himself and his father. You could have put the whole Willis house into this room, with its imposing fittings, its polished floor and Eastern rugs—the whole Willis house, and then some.

He and his father sat down. His mother stood, tall and dissatisfied, at the end of the table. She wouldn't take a place on the bench across by his father, nor the one beside him.

It was a miserable moment. Miamotu, who had brought in his tray with the two breakfasts, finally set her a chair, at the end of the table, standing by, watchful-eyed, bowing, at a loss because the mistress of the house had come in unexpectedly.

"Madam have breakfast, too? What I bring, Madam?" he asked. If she'd only tell him, and let the Jap get out of the way!

"Oh, nothing," she answered. "I don't want anything." But the instant Miamotu turned to go, "Well—tell Ishi to make me a cup of chocolate. Rolls with it. Where's the fruit?" glancing at the two places already laid.

"I didn't order fruit," impatiently. "Jule said he didn't want any—and I didn't. Have the boy bring you some, Nettie. Give him your order and let him get out."

Julian sat and looked at the table in front of him while she debated the question of grapefruit or oranges, agreed to a cereal, thought she would—then thought she wouldn't—and finally took—eggs. When Miamotu bustled out, he heard his father draw a breath of relief, and mutter as he attacked his bacon:

"I suppose you can't bounce those fellows—yet a while."

"Why should I discharge them?" she flared at him.

"You shouldn't," he returned concisely. "But I'm not going to be sorry when they're out of the house. They'll go. Japs

don't last long with you. You've never kept any servant a year, have you?"

"I've had Ben Dye on the ranch for seventeen years," coldly. "I kept Thatcher Dye here as chauffeur till it became impossible on account of Julian."

"I'm not speaking of people like the Dyes. Better see to it that old Ben has his place for life, too—now. As for Thatch—foolishness firing him in the first place—" he broke off and glanced at Julian who, as a sort of defence, began to eat his breakfast. "I'm going to put some money into the garage. That'll keep Thatch quiet."

"Oh." Sudden understanding evidently silenced his mother. How stupid his father's cynical estimate was! Didn't he know a real man when he saw one and heard him talk? Well—it was an ill wind. . . . Grotesquely the thought came to Julian, so this was how Thatch was to get the needed capital. He had wished—down there in Siloam—that he could provide it; and here he was at least indirectly providing it. Uncle Ben had felt bad because he couldn't dig up the money for Thatch. Fathers did start their sons in life. Of course, up to yesterday he, Julian, hadn't had any father. He stole a quick glance at the man over there, eating away. The beating, yesterday evening. . . . But there was no use saying that his father wasn't more a father now. He was. . . . The road in front of "Restlands," where the track took off for the little hollow . . . himself telling Lynnie that he believed he'd like to go in partnership with Thatch Dye. Under his brows he took another look at those two. His mother was out of the question. His father . . . his father. . . . Ah, what was the use? He was going to leave home. Help him? Provide for him? Why, they'd never even let him go in any peaceful way. He was going to marry Lynnie, if—if she'd have him. Better just get out with as few words as possible.

His father was breakfasting with relish.

"Now about those shindigs you're having at the house, Nettie: one to-day and one to-morrow—isn't it?"

"Oh, Stephen," Julian, determinedly negotiating a bit of bacon, followed her movements as she fussed with her chocolate, complaining, accusing, driving Miamotu into a fluttering frenzy, "You knew I'd called off the one for Julian—you knew it."

"I didn't," sharply. "I understood last night you were going to put them both through on schedule."

"With his face in that condition? You yourself made it impossible, Stephen."

"Piffle!" but his father reddened under the taunt. "No trouble accounting for a bump like that, on a fellow who drives a car. Those two parties—er, receptions—here—good cover to our movements—none better. I depended on 'em. Let the public in. Play a plain hand. If you begin running and hiding, you'll get into the papers with this; that's what you'll do."

"Well, I'm going through with the breakfast concert to-day. But I've called off the birthday luncheon for to-morrow," his mother said. "It's done now. It's too late to change that. And from now on I shall spare myself the trouble of making any attempt to see that he has a proper social set."

Miamotu bustled back and forth.

"Tick—tock. Tick—tock," said the calm, reserved mahogany timepiece—how slowly!

"Huh," his father grunted. "Rather find a social circle of his own—eh? Don't blame him. Most live boys would. Dancing-school business—good for nothing but for a kid to sharpen his teeth on, learning fancy manners."

"Manners!" his mother was scornful. "The Julians have manner, not manners." That had always been one of her sayings. Now it sawed on his nerves like a buzzing and stinging of gnats. "The ranch is certainly the place for him—until he's fit to be seen," his mother settled it. "Uncle Ben's devoted to me. He won't ask questions."

"I'm not going to the ranch." They might as well know it.

"Well! Where are you going, then?"

"You can't keep your nib out, can you, Nettie?" his father put in before there could be any reply. "He'll stay till after ten o'clock, anyhow—probably till noon; won't you, Jule?"

"Ten o'clock? Noon?" She raised her voice, full of anger; then glanced about and dropped it suddenly. "I tell you I can't have him here—with a house full of guests. And I'd put him on the programme—for the Peer Gynt suite. Everybody'll be asking . . . I shall have to be explaining . . . making up excuses——"

"That's your part of it, Nettie. You've got to look after the

social end—with Calkins to help you. Fix up whatever story you think best. Jule and I'll keep out of your way. Your breakfast's at twelve. We have those folks here at ten o'clock; probably get through the whole matter before your gang begins to arrive."

Julian's eyes were on the clock face. Eighteen minutes of nine.

"People here? What people?" cried his mother. "You didn't tell me about any engagement!"

"It just came up this morning," an uneasy glance in Julian's direction. "I'll take care of it. It'll be in the library—again. Out of the way of you and your guests. May want you in—for a minute, Antoinette—that's all."

"What *are* you talking about?"

She waited till Miamotu had come and gone. His father held an eye on the swinging door; when it ceased to vibrate after the Japanese, he spoke in a lowered tone.

"Julian wants to have a final word with—the—the girl."

She pushed away from the table. The napkin she flung down jarred her cup so that the chocolate slopped in all directions.

"Not in my house!" she cried.

It flamed through Julian like fire. He was half out of his seat before his father began to speak, not loud, but with visibly tense jaw muscles.

"Yes. In your house." He let a browbeating gaze rest on her while that soaked in, then added, "or rather, in your house and mine." She was a bit crestfallen, bending there mopping up the splashes of chocolate. He finished on a milder note, "Right here in the house, Nettie. It's the only safe place."

"I call it horrible." She sank back in her chair, not looking at him as she spoke, but not done quarrelling. "I think you might have spared me—" she choked a moment, then went on—"the humiliation of bringing that creature into my home!"

Julian was up now at a spring. At the door, his father's tone, invincibly, resolutely commonplace, checked him.

"Now, Jule, don't fly off the handle. Where're you going?"

"Up to get my suitcases and put them on my machine."

"Where then, if it's not asking too much?"

"Stephen, you know well enough! Don't let him go!"

"WHAT COULD YOU ARREST ME FOR?"
JULIAN FLUNG AT THEM

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"Keep cool, Nettie. Jule'll not do anything rash. Leave it to me."

"I tell you he will. If you let him go now—he'll have to be followed and arrested."

"What could you arrest me for?" A queer fury thrilled all through Julian as he turned and flung the question at them both.

"Nettie, I wish to the Lord you'd be still! If you can't control yourself, leave the room. Y' understand I'm not making any threats, Jule—but what your mother means is that you'd have to commit perjury to get a license. You're not of age. Such a marriage could be annulled——"

"I've got to stand by Lynnie," Julian broke in. "Whatever she wants——"

"Well, yes—whatever she wants that you could do. I'm the man that's giving you a chance to consult the girl and find out what she actually does want. I may or may not think that you'd be very wise about it. But I'm giving you your chance."

Julian looked with an agony of inquiry at his father's face. It was hard to know what to do.

"I'm afraid," his father argued, "you've got the idea that the girl has to choose between you and disgrace. Nothing in that. I'm ready to put up the money. Willis is keen for it. I told you what I'd do for the Jordan woman. Thatch and his father are safe—and we're going to keep them that way. If those people show a scrap of sense there doesn't need to be any scandal. The girl can go away——"

"Would you give them—us—this money if Lynnie and I married and went away together?"

"Are you crazy?" cried his mother. "No! No! Never, with my consent."

He looked at them—turned and went without a word.

Up in his room, alone, he got the full force of what had been said. He could leave home; but he couldn't marry Lynnie till he was twenty-one. Well, an honourable, acknowledged relation, then—an engagement. He picked up his suitcases and went downstairs. He hadn't a friend in the world. Nothing was to be hoped from those people in there. Crossing the hall, passing the library door, he heard their voices still raised. His father had got to the point of argument where he hammered the table for emphasis. His mother seemed to be in tears. On impulse

he pushed the door half open, neither noticed him; it was their quarrel—the same old quarrel:

"Stephen—don't speak so loud. I'm not objecting to anything you've done—or are going to do. I—I'm glad to have you—to—take charge of the situation and handle it."

"Yes. I get you. And when I'm done—you're done with me, again. I'm just a policeman you've yelled for to quell a disturbance."

"Certainly not. What a coarse way to put it."

"Oh, I'm coarse. My morals didn't suit. You consider me loose—or ought I to say low? For twelve years we've been barely on speaking terms. Now that you need me, you think you'll whistle me up—and then send me to my kennel again when you're done with me. Damned if you do any such thing."

"Stephen! Stephen! You're so hard. And rude. You blame me . . . with everything. I've certainly brought him up a gentleman. He certainly is that."

"My God!" insultingly. "Your idea of a gentleman! He wasn't fit to run the streets by himself. That's how you brought him up! Ever since he was a brat of seven—dangling around with you and a lot of old hens at pink teas. What does he know that a full-witted boy of his age ought to know? What does he know about women—real women? Certainly didn't teach him how to behave to a girl when he had her alone in the dark."

The words were frightful—like the blows of yesterday, yet it was all true—it was honest. As his father finished, "And he's my son, too—get that!" with a flash of something akin to hope Julian threw open the door, stepped inside and set his suitcases down with a thump. His father jumped up and came toward him, reaching for one of them, asking easily:

"Off now, Jule? You don't want to leave the house till you've——"

"No," Julian interrupted; he searched the face before him still with that agony of inquiry. How much sincerity was there here? "If I thought you'd really have Lynnie . . . give me a chance to speak to her—I'd stay."

"I'll have the girl at the house by ten—or eleven. Where're you taking those things—to the garage?" He took hold of one. "I'll do as I said. You shall have your talk all out; and Jule—

be reasonable. You can't do more than ask her, and be refused. If she doesn't seem to want you, don't stand in the girl's light."

Without a word Julian dragged the suitcase away—no—no—nothing for him here. It was given up reluctantly, his father hesitating:

"I was going with you—er—help you with the luggage."

"I'll wait to hear what Lynnie says. And—" Julian's voice broke uncontrollably, "I'd rather wait alone."

CHAPTER XVII

NO

JULIAN carried his suitcase out to the garage, and stowed them, without his mind at all taking part in the action of his hands, on either side of the Go-devil, between mud-guards and engine, pushing them down mechanically, rocking them a bit to see if they would hold their place when the machine was running. Here was where he would wait alone.

The little car with the luggage on—there stood his entire fortune; a second-hand roadster and an outfit of clothes suitable for a young millionaire! When he started up and hit the road, that's what he had to begin life on, and no knowledge of any way of earning a living. He had been scornful of Tony De Vega as a suitor for Lynnie. Why, the man had land and some cattle—probably earned his own money since he was fifteen. . . . Her worn-out shoes; the poor little, threadbare serge skirt with a hole burnt in it, that she said would have to be made over for a small sister; her talk about being glad to get work at Bruckner's. . . . Why wouldn't such support as Tony De Vega's look good to her? . . . A year before he'd be twenty-one. Well, anyhow, he wasn't going to leave this morning without seeing Lynnie. No use to go down there to her house any more. His father's offer was the best thing in sight—worth waiting a while for.

He backed the machine over to the floor tank by shoving it, unscrewed the cap and began pumping in gasoline.

The snores no longer sounded from Kamura's room. Instead there had been a noisy yawning, then the thump of bare feet on the floor, followed by movements of the Japanese getting dressed. Then a black head was put in at the door with:

"Want me?"

"No."

"I go eat my breakfast," Kamura emerged now, fully dressed. "After breakfast I come oil her up—huh?"

"No. I don't want you."

"Aw ri'."

Julian knelt beside the machine, can in hand. The Jap circled him, bandy-legged, inquisitive, those beady eyes on the injured face. The air trembled for a moment with Kamura's desire, and even intention, to say something about it. Frowning a little, Julian glanced around at him. There was the grey sweater—the sweater Lynnie had worn! His mother must have given it to Kamura. The little monkey had it on. Julian's muscles stiffened. He could have torn that sweater off the Jap—but what was the use? He'd never want to touch it again—after Kamura. He felt rather a sense of relief when, with a sudden, somewhat alarmed, "Aw ri'," the chauffeur whiffeted out and went to the house for his breakfast.

After that, sheer nervous impatience almost overcame Julian. In the effort to stay it a little he went all over the machine once more. To do this he had to get the luggage off. He opened up the engine, saw that the crank case was full, turned up grease cups that needed it, wiped, polished, tuned up the roadster. And while his hands worked with their usual skill his mind was down there in that awful place, with those awful people who had Lynnie. What would they do to her?

Of course it was not time yet to expect them, but every noise over at the house had him hurrying to the garage door. Only the great harp that Madam D'Angoula was to play being carried in; the caterer's men at the back door; hampers, boxes, folding chairs. At last he refused to jump and run for every sound, so that about eleven o'clock Calkins walked in on him and startled him. Julian knew instantly that he had been sent. His mother—what did she expect to find out through Calkins?

"May I come in? Shall I be in your way?"

"Not at all." Julian got up vaguely, wiping his hands on a bit of cotton waste. Calkins couldn't fail to see the plastered-up cheek; but he didn't say a word. He'd been told something; and that something would be whatever Julian's mother thought suitable or profitable. If he'd only go away! It was an affliction to have him here just now. Yet—people for whom Julian could really care were so few—he wouldn't hurt Calkins's feelings or seem to reject him in any way. Poor old chap, he was making talk:

"Fine storm we had last night."

"Yes, Sir." (O God—last night!)

"Your mother tells me you're not going to play this morning, after all."

"No, Sir—I'm not going to play."

"But you'll be around here a while?" the assertion was interrogative. "I rather wanted to chuck the thing myself, and have a talk with you about—about the starting up of work."

The speech wasn't like Calkins; it had been put in his mouth. Julian answered as though he were speaking to his mother.

"I'm going to stay here," he got the words out one by one, "till—well—till noon—if I have to. If—then—" He looked down at a wrench he held in his hands, turning it slowly, waiting for a little more breath. "I don't know where I'll go then. But I'll not be here after—about eleven o'clock—possibly twelve."

Calkins stood a moment silent. Julian was sorry for him. Finally he seemed to take his courage in both hands.

"Just what do you mean by that, McCulloch?" he asked at a gulp. "Are you thinking of leaving home?"

"No," said Julian. "I've left."

"I—I see." Calkins's tone showed that he didn't see at all. "Is there— If there should be anything I could do—you'd ask me?"

"Oh—yes."

"Well—I'll see you again?"

"I think so, Sir." Julian didn't try to make his tone encouraging.

"I—I wish there was something—" Calkins let it go at that.

Julian shoved past him to the garage door. Women's voices sounded over there on the drive. It was Dale Pollard with Lemaire, who would make the flashlight photograph of the dining-table and the seated guests. Paula was with her aunt. They looked across, and Julian thought for a moment they were going to come straight over. He wasn't aware of having spoken, but Calkins, beside him, said:

"I'll stop them," and headed through the wet grass with that odd little halt of his.

After they were gone into the house, Julian drew a bit back and watched. Again, as when he had stood in the window of his

father's room upstairs, he knew that the day was very spacious and sunny, with that gay, ironical effect of laughing at the damage of last night's storm. The blue and green and gold, winking and shimmering with light, made small of the gale that had blown in the door against his father's holding, that had drenched the sleeping-porch, and wrecked a thousand blossoms in the garden. He kept his place in shadow; people were coming to the front of the house now; one after another the motors discharged their chattering passengers at the main entrance and made the turn of the gravelled sweep there. The windows of the dining-room and parlours had the blinds pulled down for artificial light. They stared blankly. He looked at his watch. It was getting along toward noon. But somehow he didn't think his father would fail him. His father had been right, too—the house was the best place for them to meet. There in the library he and Lynnie could come to an understanding at last. With the breakfast-concert going on, they'd be as secluded in the library—as forgotten—as though there were nobody in the house. He'd tell her—he knew now— He'd say——

Then his breath caught in his throat. There were footsteps over on the back drive.

His father and Willis came into view, walking side by side up the winding way under the ropes of wistaria and pink passion vine, around the clumps of pampas grass and giant bamboo. It was a kind of nightmare, in which he saw each least detail with a frightful clearness. After them—was this Lynnie?—Lynnie between her mother and Jane Jordan, like a prisoner, head down, creeping along!

Up at the front the fashionable crowd going in had no sight of this strange procession which got to the side door and stopped, a close group on the wet flags.

Jane Jordan left the others and came across to the garage, her skirts held high over stout shoes and thick ankles. When she was within ten feet of the door she saw him back in the shadow, and said in a perfectly colourless tone:

"Your father wants you—in the house."

That was all. She went very quietly past, and on out the front way. For a moment Julian's gaze followed her, wondering a little; she had moved and spoken like a different woman from

the Jane Jordan of a few hours since—the Jane Jordan of that scene in the Willis kitchen.

Then he found himself back at the sink, washing his hands. He was aware of walking across to the house. The others had gone in. The side porch was empty. There was nobody in the entry, either; but he heard sounds of music from upstairs—just the tuning of violins and viola—and when he got to the library door, there they stood, inside—all of them.

"We're waiting—for your mother," Stephen McCulloch said.

"I'll go and get her."

"No. Come in—and shut the door."

Julian did neither. This was no such chance as had been promised him. Here was nothing that he would have waited for. His eyes went past the older Willises to Lynnie where she drooped beside her mother. His heart contracted at the look of her. Her fair, delicate little face was sodden from long weeping. She who had always been so neat and careful and orderly seemed neglected, forlorn, with her pretty hair scrambled into a knot at the back of her neck any fashion. And yet she was Lynnie. If somehow they could get away from these people!

Then his mother's voice sounded in the entry behind him:

"Stephen, you sent for me. Where do you want me? In there?"

Julian drew back for her to pass—a purely mechanical movement—but when he caught sight of the way she had dressed herself for a morning function, he had a swift upswell of raw anger. She was as magnificent as he had ever seen her for a ball—all to break down a poor little girl like Lynnie! It was a malicious woman's trick. She gave him not one glance, but looked to his father as she came in, and spoke, passing one hand nervously over the back of the other to settle the many flashing rings in place.

"What is it you want of me, Stephen?" she said, when she had sent a cold stare over the others, and made a scarcely articulate sound of greeting.

Lynnie barely raised her eyes to the shining figure, then dropped her head and stood as before. The Willises, on either side of her, shuffled uneasily. Charley Willis swallowed and looked away. His wife set thin, pink lips together and bowed to the rich woman, half defiantly.

As for his mother, Julian, looking to see how she took her first glimpse of Lynnie standing there like a culprit, was afire with rage at her, with shame for her. If it hadn't been that there was Lynnie over there, he'd have turned and left the whole thing. His mother didn't look directly at Lynnie; she kept jerking her chin up and then glancing sidewise at the poor little thing with a kind of horrified, hostile air. . . . Well—get it over. He came in now, and pulled the door to behind him.

"Father," he said, bluntly, "I expected to speak to Lynnie —alone."

"I guess you hadn't better—" Charley Willis began with feverish haste. He still held his hat clutched in his hands, and looked across it imploringly at McCulloch.

"It seems to me—" Mrs. Willis broke in, and was in her turn interrupted by the one authority there:

"Maybe the girl doesn't care to see you alone, Julian. How is that?" he spoke to Lynnie. For a minute it was as though she hadn't heard. Then she shivered and shook her head.

"You see," he faced back, conclusively.

Julian felt himself trapped. Yet—he was past any embarrassment in speaking to Lynnie before the others. Why couldn't he say what he had to say—here and now? He crossed the room to that strange little figure; Mrs. Willis bristled as he came near. He paid no attention to any of them, but finally said, very low:

"Lynnie." That was all. When he got no response he repeated a little more urgently, "Lynnie!" and then, "look at me."

She would not. He had finally to speak without seeing her face.

"I—" he broke off. There could be no asking till there was absolution. "I've behaved like a dog to you," he said hopelessly. "I haven't any right to expect you to forgive me."

At that she looked up—such a look!—and shaped something with her lips that might have been, "I do." Then suddenly she seemed to weaken all over.

He would have caught her in his arms, but Mrs. Willis got between, and it was his father who, with a quick motion, pushed a chair under her so that she didn't fall but sat down, and remained there shuddering, apparently weeping, though her head drooped so low that Julian could not be sure.

"Well—if you do feel as if you—could ever forgive me," he went on desperately, "I won't be twenty-one for a year—but don't you want to marry me—at all—ever?"

A long, racking silence. The room was deathly still with it. The noises of the breakfast-concert above seemed to belong to another world.

"Julian," it was his mother. His father must have tried to stop her, for the next thing she said was, "Stephen—I will speak. He's got to be told. The girl's got to understand, too."

"Mother—I'm talking to Lynnie."

"Yes, and I've a word to say to—to her," his mother avoided Lynnie's name as though it had been a mud puddle. But she came over and stood close to them both as she said, first to him, "You understand your father and I are paying her money—a great deal of money—ten thousand dollars, if she'll go away." Then, to Lynnie herself—and, oh, what a galling, abhorrent tone she used!— "If he goes with you he'll get nothing from us. Not a cent. And of course you'll get nothing."

"Lynnie—don't let her—I'll work for you. I'll earn a living for you. I——"

He broke down. Suddenly memory came back to him of a hillside, himself and Lynnie sitting where the tan weeds rustled dry and sere, Lynnie crying because Tony De Vega was married! A whirl of thought of that earlier time. . . . Under the oaks in the Spanish cemetery at San Pablo—himself with his head in her lap, telling her that he didn't believe he could earn a living—Lynnie stroking his hair, saying that his people were rich and he was an only son. God—was this all there was to it?

"Lynnie—" He tried to go on; his father's voice, dry, commonplace, but somehow triumphant, broke in on him.

"Now, Jule, remember what I said to you about standing in the girl's light. You can't expect us to do a thing for her if you hang on this way. It's all very fine to talk about working. You couldn't support yourself. What would she live on? Do the decent thing by her. Let her alone."

Both the Willises spoke up after that, clamouring at him with words he couldn't hear. Mrs. Willis, as she had down there in her own kitchen, got in front of her daughter. In the middle of everything there was a tap on the door, louder knocking that silenced everything, and then Calkins's voice said:

"Is Mrs. McCulloch there? I don't want to intrude, but——"

Julian's mother was across the room in an instant.

"What is it?" she asked. "Oh—they're wanting to serve? Let them—no, it won't do for them to sit down without me. Stephen," she spoke over her shoulder, "how soon may I go?"

"Now—I guess," her husband said. "I guess we can spare you now."

She went without ever once looking back.

Julian pushed Mrs. Willis away. He had to take hold of her shoulder and move her so that he could get to see Lynnie. She turned on him as he did it, crying:

"Don't you think that's about enough, now? Can't you let my poor girl alone? You see, plain, that she doesn't want you. Your father's done what he could to patch things up. He's going to help us out. All you can do is to make trouble. If I was you I'd quit."

It sounded so dreadfully sane—and reasonable—and true. Again there was a sick silence. Lynnie made not even any motion to contradict her mother's words.

But Julian couldn't let it go so. They were crowding him. It was a set up thing. He'd got to try once more to break through it. If he could only touch her hand. He took the ring from his pocket and held it out to her. She didn't look, but he knew by the little tremor that went over her that she understood when he said:

"Won't you wear it again?"

"No."

Those words she had written on the paper—he made them his next question.

"Never—any more?"

She lifted her head then; her eyes travelled slowly all around the room, and finally fixed themselves on his father's face. She answered, hardly above her breath, in the one word:

"No."

"I guess that settles it, Jule." It was his father's voice, his father's hand on his shoulder. Julian let it turn him. He went as far as the door. "Slip upstairs—to your room—before the people begin to go through to the dining-room," his father spoke low. "I'll be with you in a minute. Let these folks get away

now. The poor little thing's about all in. She—she's had it hard, Jule. Have some mercy on her."

Outside, Julian stood a moment where his father had left him. It was done—it was over. No hope. Lynnie wasn't going to be in his life—in any sort of fashion—any more. He knew now, in his incredulous agony, that he hadn't believed it could happen. Numb, blinded, he stumbled across to the garage and the Go-devil, waiting there ready, looked a while at it vaguely, then started it with a push and climbed in. The little car took the curve, and rolled noiselessly abreast of the side door of the house, just as those from the library appeared there.

He was passively aware of his father's surprised motion, as though he would have stopped him; he felt dimly the sullen stare of Charley Willis and his wife, gazing after the young millionaire in his car, riding away from the ruin he had wrought. But it was Lynnie's face that he really saw in that moment of passing—a strange look—a look that went with him to tear him with a torture of doubt.

CHAPTER XVIII

ESCAPE

ON down the brick drive, by gravity; throwing in power at the foot. Through the gate; out into the road. Where now?

He would be twenty to-morrow. He was leaving home, all his earthly possessions on the machine with him, wreck and ruin behind him, nothing but heartache ahead. Which way?

Up there at the front the crowd of guests' motors with their lounging chauffeurs; taking the line of least resistance, as water runs down hill, he guided the Go-devil toward the back streets.

It was only when he saw a forlorn little trio in the Willis yard, not playing, just standing about in front of the house, that he realised anything outside of that last look of Lynnie's. The children ran together like frightened partridges, and clung so, fluttering. In the instant of getting by them, he could still see Lynnie's eyes with their strange message. How could she refuse him forever—and then look at him like that?

Other houses, or people down in the hollow, he didn't notice till he was creeping over the tracks at the factory, and there was Zen Daggett, hands in pockets, a cigarette drooping from the corner of his mouth, hailing:

"H'lo, Jule! Who changed your map for you?"

"Changed it myself."

Out on the viaduct that led toward San Vicente he may have met persons he knew. His mind so persistently conjured up those who were not present, that he couldn't be sure; though there remained a vague idea of his plastered-up face being looked at with surprise. After the edge of San Vicente a mixed impression of streets, squares, outside roads. There must have been a lot of it, for he left Las Reudas, travelling at a pretty good clip, a little past noon, and he wheeled into Thatch Dye's garage—when it was nearly quitting time.

Bill, the cherub-faced young fellow Thatch had helping him,

came hurrying out of the queer hole at the back where they vulcanised the tires.

"Want to see Thatch?" Then with a sudden grin that showed two deep dimples in his pink cheeks, "Golly—you been in one smash-up!" Julian was climbing down, Billy examining the car. "Didn't hurt the little boat any."

"Where's Thatch?" Julian asked.

"Out trying to sell a man a machine. Due to be in any minute now."

"Tell him I'm here—please." Julian went up the stairs to Thatch's bedroom. At first every machine that came in below seemed to concern him. Each time, he had to hurry over and stand at the head of the stairs, only to hear voices of strangers talking to Billy about repairs or the washing of cars, or garage room for the night. The very noises of the street pushed in on his attention, calling him to the window to look down.

But as time went on and Thatch still didn't come, he began to be made aware of his inhuman weariness and exhaustion. He went and sat on Thatch's bed. The room didn't whirl about him; it just moved gently wherever he looked at it; in one breath, his body felt very light, and in the next seemed to weigh a ton. Now that he sat still he realised a dull throbbing in his temples; the cut on his cheek burned under the plasters. His whole being seemed to palpitate and sort of waver.

There was no longer anything to fight, any one to hold out against, or to keep up appearances before; nothing left to struggle over. He'd tried all he knew, and failed. He just sat on Thatch's bed, his head in his hands, while evening darkened, people came and went below there; the street lights lit up. And around and around the one point his thought circled, stupid, bewildered: Yes, yes, yes; he knew that he'd cruelly wronged Lynnie; but he couldn't get it into his mind that she should hate him! He had fairly lost the sense of his whereabouts, when somebody came running up the stairs, jerked open the door and Thatch's voice said:

"Jule?" Then, "Oh, you are here—I didn't see you at first."

He switched on the light. He didn't waste any time howling around; after a look at Julian he just kept saying:

"That's right. You knew where to come. I told you to come to me. That's right."

"Thank you, Thatch."

Thatch took another look, and said:

"You need food, boy. You're empty. Come on out to the cafeteria with me."

"Think I'd better not."

"Don't want to be seen? They don't know where you are? All right."

Thatch went for his own supper, and brought Julian's back, carrying up at the same time the small handbag from the roadster.

The food did make Julian feel more like himself. After it he lay back and closed his eyes. He'd had no sleep worth talking about for a good while.

"You'd better undress and get to bed," Thatch advised.

"Where'll you sleep?"

"Chair—down in the office. Keeping garage to-night."

The telephone rang below. Thatch went to answer it. Julian undressed and lay down. It was a blessed relief to be stretched out in bed, under a friend's roof. When Thatch came back and found him so, he said:

"Well, I told your folks the truth, without intending to."

Julian looked dull inquiry from his pillow.

" 'Phoned to know if I'd seen or heard anything of you. Told 'em you were here—in bed and asleep. Best thing you can do is to make good on that."

Julian just nodded, closed his eyes again, and lay still. Thatch fussed around the room a little while, then went down stairs.

Julian was at Thatch's garage in San Vicente three days. He was frightfully tired; he was drowsy all the time, but shaken and nervous, too. He'd fall asleep, like a drugged thing, to wake up from dreams in which he talked in anguish to Lynnie, argued with his mother, accusing her of what he was, of what he had done, dreams so real that he'd look around the room to find the people he'd been talking to. At first he sat upstairs, there, and hardly cared to go out to meals with Thatch; but the second day he heard his father's voice downstairs, and after it Thatch told him that he guessed they intended to let him alone a little while.

In the evening, or when Thatch wasn't busy downstairs, they talked together in snatches about the future.

"I can see how you feel," Thatch put it. "Don't blame you a bit. But it's a whole lot of money. Of course, even if you won't stay with them, they ought to fix you up—but will they?"

Julian shook his head. He knew his mother would not. Thatch seemed to have the same idea, for he went on:

"You ought to have it. When your father talked to me about putting money in here— A man's more reasonable, you know, kid. Why don't you strike him for some sort of a start—some sort of outfit? You've got a right to it. Oh, well—get to sleep if you can. To-morrow's another day."

And so Julian slept again—and again. It was in the grey of the third morning that he wakened suddenly, and sat up in his bed trembling with a strange sense of Lynnie's just having gone —a feeling that they had but that moment taken her away from him. The agony of parting was more keenly on him than it had been three days ago when they really parted.

He looked slowly around the room, recognising one object after another in the half light. What was the matter with him? What had happened? Was that a dream, a nightmare?—or was it the truth, that he had gotten up out of bed, gone downstairs very quietly and taken his machine. . . . His machine? Then where was Thatch? Maybe in the office, asleep; anyhow, Thatch wasn't in it, some way. . . . Had he taken the machine and driven it out to Las Reudas, gone past the factory, on into the hollow to the Willis home? He looked at his clothes over there on the chair. They seemed to lie just as he had left them—but he couldn't be sure. In his dream, or whatever it was, he had seemed to be dressed as usual. After he reached the Willis gate there was a sort of blur on things; he stood in the yard, looking at a litter of papers and excelsior,—strings—a packing box—as though the family had moved out. There was some queer, vague stuff after that—his pounding on the door and calling—but nothing about his getting back. It all melted into this strange agony that Lynnie had just gone—just been taken away from him.

"Hello! What's the idea?" Thatch looked in at the door. "You awake? Better get back to sleep. I'll call you in plenty time to go out for breakfast."

He wanted to ask Thatch—but what? He lay down, rolled over, hunched the blankets across his ear, and slept till noon.

When he waked this time Thatch was in the room setting down a tray of lunch.

"Though I wouldn't wake you; seemed to be sleeping so good. I'll shove the table over there and let you eat where you are."

Julian was up and dressed, Thatch out somewhere, when he heard the 'phone downstairs ring and ring, and finally Billy answering it. He paid no more attention until the boy ran up the steps, poked his head in at the door, and said with a queer look on his face:

"Somebody on the wire wants you, Mr. McCulloch. What'll I say to 'em?"

Julian didn't ask who it was.

"Tell them to hold the wire," he said. "I'll be there in a minute."

When he got downstairs he found it was his mother 'phoning.

"Julian, is that you? Is that you, at last?"

"Yes, Mother, it's I."

"Well—I want to see you. Will you come to me?"

"No, Mother. I will not."

"You—! Julian, you must come—for a few minutes, anyhow. I'm not able to go to you."

"No. I'll not go out there."

"But I'm not at the house. I'm in town at the apartment. Do come to me here. It's not much to ask." He stood a moment with the receiver at his ear, then she finished, "I'm here, ill."

"Very well. I'll be over as soon as I can get there," and he hung up.

The Antoinette was across town from Thatch's garage, reached by the Arbolado line, with a transfer at Fortieth. When, a half hour later, Tatsu opened the door of the apartment to him and took his hat, he heard voices in the sitting-room; his mother's and a man's.

"Doctor here," with the usual giggle and duck.

"Then—I'll wait." But his mother had heard and called:

"Bring Mr. Julian in, Tatsu."

He went forward. She was on the couch, in one of her exquisite negligées. She just smiled and nodded toward him, as though they had parted fifteen minutes before. Dr. McCurdy got up from his seat beside her, and shook hands, looking at his hurt face. Tatsu was shuffling in with a basin of hot water,

putting it on the tabouret where McCurdy already had his little black bag open. He motioned Julian to a chair in a good light. It was easier to submit than to make a fuss and get out.

"Your mother wanted me to give you the once over, too, young fellow," the doctor announced, as he set to work, gently heating the original plasters so he could draw them off. "All that smoke you inhaled—down there in Siloam—might be a little hard on the Julian lungs."

"I think I'm all right, Doctor." Under McCurdy's manipulations he shot his mother one look.

"Whee-ee! That was a cut!" as the plasters came off. "Went to the bone. Ought to have had a stitch when it first happened. Who fixed it up for you then?"

"My father."

McCurdy, drawing the lips of the wound together, and smoothing down a thin, silken plaster over them, seemed a bit startled. "Er—well, not criticising amateur work, I still think that looks better," he said. "Hardly shows at all," gathering up his instruments, jingling them into the bag, glancing about to see that he had left nothing. "Shall I make my lung tests now? Or will you drop into the office for them to-morrow?" There was sudden silence and he added a little awkwardly, "Unless you'd rather have me come out to the house."

"I shan't be at Las Reudas—to-morrow."

"Oh, you're in town? Well, drop in at the office, then."

The doctor had got to the door, when his mother raised herself on her cushions, with a languid:

"Dr. McCurdy, I think you'd better call at Las Reudas. I think Julian will be there—to-morrow."

For a moment after the doctor was gone they faced each other silently. It was her long, slate-grey eyes that fell before his. She looked away from him, but she motioned him imperatively to a chair.

"Sit down," she said, querulously.

Instead, he laid a hand on the back of the chair she indicated, and spoke to her across it.

"What made you say that to Dr. McCurdy? You know there is no use making appointments for me out at the house."

He saw the familiar twitch of her nostril. Again that curious

duel of the eyes; this time she held out and spoke, looking squarely at him.

"Going to live forever in Thatcher Dye's garage?" she said bitterly. "How childish! There in that filthy place, keeping all sorts of hours, no doubt, eating heaven knows what! I saw Dr. McCurdy thought you looked ill; but I couldn't tell him why."

"Do you really think that three days at Thatcher Dye's would affect my health?" Julian asked slowly.

"Of course it would. You daren't run such risks, I tell you. With your lungs—bad ventilation is—it's the worst thing——"

She came to a halt. He knew it was the look in his face that stopped her. For a moment he had been tempted to throw at her like a taunt his knowledge of the futile lie she had kept up all these years about the cause of Tom Julian's death. But that would smash Uncle Ben—it would cost him his place. He didn't care so much, anyhow; it was only a few minutes; and she'd not catch him again this way. She began now at a little different point:

"Few mothers have given the time and thought, even to an only son, that I have given you, Julian. And the other day, because your wishes had been crossed, and that sullen temper of yours roused, you left the house without a word to me—not even saying good-bye—and humiliate me by staying with common people in a common garage! I can't believe that you really like to be there. You do it to spite me."

"You said you were sick—you got me to come here on that pretext," he put it all aside. "I ought to have known better than to believe you."

At that she blazed up a bit, sitting erect among her cushions.

"Julian, do you forget that you are entirely dependent on me? You were always stubborn and—and—but what's come over you? What on earth made you go away like that? Was it"—glancing at the plasters McCurdy had put on so neatly—"on account of what your father did?"

"Good Lord, no!"

"That wasn't my fault. I didn't approve of it. Nothing of the sort will ever happen again—I promise you."

He just let that go. No use trying to make her understand that he would rather have been beaten any day than to hear her speak of Lynnie, see her look at Lynnie, as she had.

"Well, then, those people?" (He didn't know for a moment she was speaking of the Willises.) "They're gone. I shouldn't consider having you in Las Reudas, otherwise. They're gone."

"When—?" Julian gripped the chairback.

"Yesterday. Your father finally got them packed up, bag and baggage, and away."

Packed up, bag and baggage. Gone. . . . The gulch, dim under last night's moon, the excelsior and papers blowing about; the hollow sound of his own fist hammering on the door of an empty house. . . .

His mother was talking still, fast and nervously, saying something about his birthday and the gift she had got for it . . . a billiard table. . . . She had fitted up a billiard room for him. He stopped her with:

"I'm never going out to Las Reudas again."

"You think I'll pay over your allowance and let you live where and how you choose? Or do you intend to appeal to your father?"

"Better to him than to you."

"You'll get nothing from him, I can tell you. He feels just as I do."

Julian had been going to the door; he turned around with:

"Since when could you speak for my father? What do you know about how he feels—or what he'll do."

"I—that—" She got up, to his intense surprise flushing uneasily, came closer and said:

"Perhaps you don't understand, Julian, that I'm going to entirely overlook this—matter—of yours?"

He stared at her.

"I—the truth is, I have come to see some things quite differently. I hadn't realised—I suppose a mother never does—you're a young man now. Young men—" he saw what she was getting at "—I concede that they must have a certain license, of course——"

"Stop! You shall not say such things about——"

He turned and jerked open the hall-door behind him, as he thought, even while she called:

"Julian! Wait! Don't!"

Then he stood stupidly staring. This was not the hallway, but the little dressing-room, and on the forms about were a

dinner suit, a light top coat, a smoking jacket; beside a chair leaned a couple of walking sticks; ivory military brushes lay on the chiffonier; on the screw of its mirror hung a sheaf of ties of familiar style and colourings. In the very instant of backing away he caught sight of the sleeping suit of gay, green-and-yellow-striped silk that he had seen lying on his father's bed at Las Reudas.

He turned round then. There was his mother, all one fiery blush. For some reason he, too, was stricken with an outrageous, an inexplicable sense of shame; found his way to the hall-door, and she let him go without a word.

When he got back to the garage, there was Thatch, a good deal worked up, waiting for him, looking at him curiously, saying:

"Bill said your folks 'phoned you. Well—he said your mother 'phoned. Sorry I wasn't here when it happened. Suppose I ought to have told you that your father's spoken to me about you once or twice almost like a human being. Jule—you pin your faith to him. He's the one for you to——"

"Yes—I know it. You're right, Thatch," Jule agreed as they set out together for the cafeteria. No use telling Thatch that hope was gone.

He felt very tired, but very excited. He had a sense somehow that things were coming to a showdown. After they got back from dinner Thatch, watching him, suggested that he get right to bed, but he could not. They went upstairs and he sat on the edge of the bed and Thatch talked and talked about what could be done, getting around finally to the idea that Julian might be allowed at least a silent partner's interest in the garage.

"Of course it's not what you ought to have," he said. "But if it's all they'll give you, at present— Golly, Jule! I had a mind to strike your old man for it myself."

Again that night Thatch was keeping garage; he'd go downstairs to the office, come back and find Julian out of bed, scold him a little, and they'd start in talking once more. He was in the room, and it was nearly midnight, when finally an auto rolled in below, and something—he could not have told what—brought Julian to his feet listening.

"Just some geezer with a car to be washed," Thatch began, but broke off, infected by Julian's nervousness. He slipped to

the door and opened it quietly. Then he turned with a signal of alarm. They both recognised the voice which said below there:

"He's here all right, my dear—in the room above."

The speed with which Thatch got away from the door would at any other time have been comical. Feet came up the stair; the door pushed open, and there were Julian's father and mother.

"Good evening."

Thatch offered them chairs. Without a word Julian measured the space between himself and the only door.

"Now, Julian," his father's eye was on him. This was not the same man who had made common cause with Julian, walking beside him in the hollow, dressing his wounded cheek, standing between him and his mother's gadfly persecutions at the breakfast table. "I've brought your mother to you."

Thatch was getting out, but McCulloch stopped him.

"Stay where you are, Dye. You know as much about this as any of us. I depend on you to give the boy good advice."

Julian studied his father—a bridegroom, ready to do anything to please. He knew that he himself was inexperienced at life, yet he recognised the tone as that of the bought advocate—one who argues a case for a price.

"What do you people want of me?" he asked suddenly and bluntly.

"I don't claim anything for myself," his father said, "but I expect to enforce your duty to your mother."

"My duty to my mother?" Julian was not aware of anything taunting in his repetition of the words, but he saw his mother flush. She looked instantly to his father.

"You see, Stephen—he doesn't think he has any duty to me."

"Well, he has, all the same. See here, young man. Your mother wants you to come home—and I think you've got to do it."

"Stephen—ask him if there's anything else—reasonable—that would suit him better," his mother put in.

Now was Julian's time to have made his appeal for some provision in life, such as he and Thatch had talked about. He knew Thatch expected him to say something of the kind—wondered why he didn't. He looked at his father; he saw the glances that passed between him and his mother, and before

he knew what he was going to say he had uttered—without apology or softening:

"I'd like to be let alone."

"Oh!" His mother fumbled for her handkerchief. His father watched her solicitously. He glanced at Julian and his face hardened.

"Don't cry, Nettie. The cub's not worth it." He took her arm. "Come, dear; no use staying here. We'll leave now," and they started for the door.

"I can't let it go like this," she pulled back. "To be humiliated so— Everybody will say— Oh, I can't let it go!"

"No, we won't. We won't, my dear. I've got another shot in the locker. Come."

Thatch followed them downstairs, shooting one curious, dazed look over his shoulder at Julian as he went. Julian could hear him down there talking to them. The three voices went on for some little time; then the McCulloch car backed out, and Thatch came running, taking the stairs on the jump.

"See here, kid!" he cried. "Do you know what we're up against? Your father's gone after a warrant. He can get it—with his pull. You're only twenty. All he's got to do is to swear that you're incorrigible."

Julian asked his question in one word:

"To-night?"

"Yep. It'll take him quite some time to hunt up the proper officials at twelve o'clock, like this." He eyed Julian uncertainly a moment, then, "The little Go-devil's right there. All tuned up, and full of gas. Baggage still on her. Sure you don't want to go back home—not under no circumstances?"

Julian just looked at him.

"Naw—course not. 'N I see where you're right, too. Leave 'em alone a while. Do 'em good. Twice as apt to make you some reasonable offer. 'F I was you I'd chuck them pyjams and that comb and brush in my war bag—and beat it while the beatin's good."

Julian was already scooping things from the top of the bureau into his bag. Thatch nodded, went to the table, got a card and wrote an address on it.

"There," he said, coming and putting it into Julian's hand as he knelt by the bag closing it finally. "There's a woman that'll

hide you, and lie for you—and fight for you, if necessary—and at that she's as straight as a string. Widda—both kinds; grass and sod: her first one died and she had to divorce number two."

Julian read on the card, "Mrs. Madeline Kaylor, 139 Branch St., S. F."

"That's sort of an edge of Russian Hill," Thatch said, "the cheap part, next to North Beach."

"Thank you. All ready," was Jule's only reply.

As they hurried down the stairs together, Julian pulling the collar of his coat to straighten it under the overcoat, Thatch went on flurriedly:

"Maddy used to be a dressmaker. Keeps lodgers, now. You'll get along with her all right. She's—well—sort of gushy. Be just crazy about you—she's that kind—but awfully good-hearted."

He tried to help Julian with the bag, getting it placed on the Go-devil, hindered him instead, then jerked up the hood and looked inside, exclaiming:

"I told Bill to put a new fan belt— Le's see. Darned mutt —he didn't do it! Never mind—only take a minute."

He ran to fetch the belt and set to work.

"I hope you get a room at Maddy's," he said from under the hood. "And keep away from the St. Francis and the Fairmont, where your folks stay when they're up in town."

"I'll be careful," Julian made a last inspection of the baggage lashings.

"There," Thatch clapped down the hood and replaced the suitcase on that side. "I guess that'll hold her. You're off. Say kid, I hate to have you go like this. How much money you got?"

Julian turned out his purse and found that he had thirty dollars.

"Ought to 've drawn your allowance at the bank. Now it'll be stopped."

"Oh—I'm all right."

"Well," Thatch repeated nervously, "you've got thirty dollars —a trunk full of good clothes—and a dandy little machine— You couldn't afford the swell hotels on that, but you don't want to go where folks that know you'll see you. Hang onto your money, kid. With a cheap room at Maddy's, and taking your

meals out—you can make thirty dollars last a good while. I'll dig up some to send you any time you need it."

There was a grasp of the hand, the starter snorted under a hasty foot, the Go-devil, sounding its warning, crept out across the sidewalk, into the street, and made as much speed as its driver dared till the edge of town brought the pavement of the State Highway under his wheels.

But he didn't turn toward San Francisco. Out of San Vicente he went, over the viaduct to Las Reudas; past the factory—on up into the hollow—just as he had gone in his dream. As in his dream he reached the corner where the Willis home stood. It was black and silent. He got down from the roadster and walked over to it. The gate was open. There in the dim light, just as he had expected, lay the shreds of packing stuff. . . . The last link. . . . Gone.

CHAPTER XIX

SAN FRANCISCO

FOR a while Julian stood beside his roadster in that forlorn hollow, dazed, his face lifted to where above him on the line of the Avenue, against the grey night sky were black bulks of handsome homes—his own among them—trees shouldering together in large, beautifully kept grounds. Then he laid hold of the side of his machine and climbed in. Time to be going—time to be going. He started ahead, wheeled at the corner so as to pass the McCulloch gate; but intent on getting to the street that would take him most directly to the State Highway—the road to San Francisco—he did not remember till afterward that he had passed it, at speed.

As fast as he dared, out of Las Reudas itself, through the lesser, suburban fruit ranches, and then, a little faster, along the miles and miles of prune orchards, where he could vaguely glimpse the piles of empty pickers' boxes stacked inside the fences, and in the tepid, dead, night air of the great valley, smell the heavy, fruity odour of the prunes lying on the ground. He opened the muffler and the little Go-devil roared like a dragon. His lamps, full glare, made a narrow, bright tunnel; the bit of road they brought into being, and clutched and held there, a mystic bridge from the obscurity behind to the unknown before.

On, on, on. He ceased to think, to reason, to remember. He was scarcely more than a sensation of speed in space; his going seemed to have brought him to a place where grief, remorse, resentment were all dulled, whether he would or no; without any volition of his own he was being forced to put what had happened behind him.

Then the lift of the Palo Verde grade; that would take him out of the valley; as though the earth had risen under him in a mighty groundswell. At the summit of the divide he met seawind and fog. A late moon, its significant, melancholy face

swimming in cloud showed him as it might have been all the kingdoms of earth outspread, grey, unreal, dreamlike, veiled in mist.

He got down here to change a punctured tire. Working away on the mountain top, in the night, getting the spare from its holder, putting the collapsed tire in its place, the medicine of space and silence began to cool a little the burning fever of personality. When all was done, and he swept down the long grade, engine cut out, horn braying for the curves, he still moved in a strange world where the hard-and-fast realities he had known were all shaken loose, dissolved; where, at any turn a feeling might have confronted him, walking embodied, or the flesh of an individual, the substance of a rock, a tree, have resolved itself into mere pang and tremor of an emotion.

Foggy morning gradually took the place of foggy moonlight. In this dimness he passed the familiar grounds at Palo Alto. Benchy's university here—Benchy's and a lot of other boys he knew at Stanford. Then he was going through San Bruno, the parked way that edges Burlingame. He had visited in most of these places—seen polo in the field over there, stopped at this or that Country Club for tea, travelling in his mother's wake. Was it he that did that, or some dead and gone boy whose memory he had inherited?

Still in the blue-lipped dawn he came into the cemetery region: Cypress Lawn, Mount Olivet, Forest Hills—marble and granite shouldered together on the slopes above him, as the houses of Las Reudas had seemed to shoulder last night—the dead were in both—for him.

The quiet folk up there in the white cities of tombs seemed to watch him passing in his haste and misery with a sense of superiority. They had solved it—or, anyhow, laid it by. Well—he wasn't quitting yet. Suddenly he was aware that he was hungry—furiously hungry. He wouldn't stop though to get anything to eat till he was in the city. He held on as far as the outskirts of San Francisco, and at a queer little place in the Mission, before he turned into Market Street, ate with relish the kind of breakfast they were serving there to workmen, plumbers, jitney drivers and teamsters.

Out on the sidewalk again he waited by the roadster till the way was clear of a line of powerful trucks which made slow,

ponderous going of it, taking through the open streets to the exposition grounds great forest trees, the green tops trailing back of the third pair of wheels—it gave one a queer qualm to see those highest branches which had always breathed sky-air of still, clean, remote places, sweeping the dusty asphalt.

He hadn't been in San Francisco since last midwinter; and now the pastel tints of the Exposition were everywhere; everybody was talking Exposition, and all about him preparations for the big show were hustling forward: apartment houses being hastily built, new hotels; Market Street, as he got further down, thronged with jitneys that already bore announcements, "Exposition Grounds—10c." He could only creep along in the Market Street jam, turned off it at Kearny and got across to Union. Here at Union and Montgomery was the Square Thatch had spoken of. From it he climbed in the wake of a car going out to the Presidio. Then he found Branch Street, dipped abruptly off Union into its steepness, pulled up in front of number 189, a tall, white, wooden house, fronting the bay, and rang the bell.

He faced around on the doorstep to wait. The little side street was very near the top of Russian Hill. The ground went down here like a Gothic roof; and with no buildings as yet across below, the view was heart lifting; Alcatraz just over there; the bay, the shipping, the further shore; the Marin hills beyond; Tamalpais towering above them. Julian stood and looked, and hoped that Mrs. Madeline Kaylor would have a room she could give him. He thought if he could like to live at all he'd like to live up here.

Then the door was jerked open energetically, and he saw a woman in a bright, big-flowered kimono. She was a good height, well-made, vigorous looking, with a great rope of bright brown hair falling on each side of her neck, and far down the front of the kimono. The grey eyes with which he searched her visitor's countenance—very ordinary eyes from the standpoint of beauty—were inquisitive, daring, full of fire.

This was the woman who, Thatch Dye said, would hide you or lie for you, or fight for you if necessary; who was a bit gushy, but at that as straight as a string. He could believe it all. She looked it.

"Thatcher Dye gave me your address—" That was as far as he got when she threw the door wide open, crying:

"Come in—come in! I thought it was the electric light man, and—" she laughed—"I was just going to jump you about that switch in the basement, because the fuse——"

And so forth and so on, while she led the way to a ground floor sitting-room, which bore evidence of being convertible into a bedroom—a room like herself, bright and clean; eager, emphatic, redundant; with crowded shelves, gay, cushion-piled couches, its windows much curtained, much looped, much dingle-dangled. She slacked a moment, offering him a chair, speaking without looking at the card in her hand.

"So Thatch Dye sent you? How is Thatch? Has he got his garage started? Is he married?" a sparkling smile. "I haven't seen that boy for two years or more. He comes to San Francisco —and never comes near me. Says he's on business, but I know all about that girl he's got down there in Siloam. Can't see what's the matter with his calling on me, even if he has got a girl and is here on business. I'm certainly business, myself. So Thatch Dye gave you my address?"

Into the slim conversational gap left momentarily open to him Julian hastily inserted:

"He thought you might have a room vacant."

"Not for yourself"; there was something wistful in the gaze that made a rather embarrassingly minute and estimating inspection of him. "Your sort don't come hunting rooms on the edge of North Beach—I'd say. Exposition? I'm not going to list my rooms. They're always full, anyhow."

"It's for myself, Mrs. Kaylor."

"Oh!" She threw back one heavy braid and then the other with a little nervous movement, a half laugh, and a parenthetic, "I'm a sight." Then, "How long would you want the room?"

"Why, I don't know. Indefinitely. I'm looking for a job up here."

"You're looking for a——" she broke off and stood a minute eyeing him sharply. "Well—say—didn't Thatch send me a note —or anything?"

"My card," Julian prompted her, supposing that it was his name she wanted.

"What's the matter with me this morning!" She studied the

card. "Any relation to *the* McCullochs in Las Reudas—Steve McCulloch, the patent medicine man, and Mrs. McCulloch that cuts such a great——?"

"Their son," Julian interrupted hastily.

"'Oh—Hades—Polly, you talk too much!'" laughing, clapping a hand to her mouth. "Well, at that, I didn't say anything—did I?" Next moment she broke out suddenly, "Say—I ought to have known you from your picture in the *Messenger.*"

Julian shrugged a little, and again she laughed.

"Newspaper pictures *are* awful things, ain't they? Never do you justice." Her eyes were on that scarred cheek. "But with the name and all—I'm an old San Vicente girl, and I always keep the run of my home paper—Dale Pollard's page—the society news anyhow, and things like that. And when I saw that picture and how you'd been with the fire fighters——"

"You have no room for me at present?" Julian tried to check the flow of compliment.

"N-no," reluctantly. "I wish to goodness you'd got here yesterday. I've gone and rented my third floor front to an Italian—an Italian trained nurse." Her tone was almost ridiculously wistful. She seemed to want to stop Julian as he rose. "If you care for the view, it would have been the very one you'd have wanted."

"Anything would do me," Julian said. "I'd like to be on the hill."

"You would? Well, say—listen: I'll tell you what we'll do. I'd hate not to do something about a room for you. It seems so unfriendly to—Thatch. You go on now, and ring me up in about an hour. I'll have a list of places in the neighbourhood. I'll get you a room—till I can give you one of mine here at One-thirty-nine."

"Yes, Mrs. Kaylor." Julian moved toward the door.

"And wherever you are, in the meantime, I want you to make home of my house. Just come here when you haven't got anywhere else to go. I've lived on Branch Street for six years, and round—different places in this neighbourhood—longer than that. I know everybody and everybody knows me. I'm one of those kind that can't seem to quit joining societies," moving beside him through the length of the hall. "Heavens to Betsy! I'm a member of every Ladies' Auxiliary that was ever in-

vented! I belong to everything—from the Native Daughters to the Chimney Sweeps' Union. Some of 'em's always holding a celebration of one kind or another here. When they're not, my friends have a way of blowing in on me and just taking the house. We may not be so very swell, but we're jolly, all right. Play cards or dance—you dance, of course?"

"Yes, Mrs. Kaylor." They were at the front door.

"Well you come in—any evening—and we'll get up a crowd and have a little dance, or play five hundred. I wish to goodness I had a room to give you."

They stepped out on the high stoop.

"That yours?" She gave a startled glance at the Go-devil with its trunk and suitcases. "Well, you *have* come to stay. I certainly will dig up a room for you. And say—the fellow that has one of mine I'd like to give you has got a little garage down there just off the Square, at the foot of the hill. S'pose you go down and see him?—keep your machine there, anyhow. 'Phone me from there in about an hour."

"Thank you," said Julian. "I will."

He left Mrs. Kaylor standing looking after him in her door. She talked steadily while he crossed the sidewalk and got into his machine. When he put his foot on the starter, she raised her voice:

"Oh, say—I forgot—bunch of us going to the movies to-night. Come up if you can."

Julian nodded indefinitely, lifted his hat to her, and drove away.

Back to the Square again, with its Farmacia Italia, motion picture theatre and Italian groceries; then the crooked side street with the sign "P. Fertig—Garage," and the additional information, "Repair work a specialty. Machines washed day or night."

To Julian, P. Fertig somewhat reluctantly disclosed himself as a man of indefinite age, average size, nondescript attire; nothing to distinguish him from a thousand other men in the city except a slight cast in one of the light, greenish-grey eyes, which gave to his glance a curious, departing quality. He might have been forty, forty-five, even fifty, but then again, he might be only thirty—though he was getting a little grey about the temples; and he was dingy rather than dirty. Julian drove the

Go-devil into the garage, on impulse, and then rather wished he had not done so till he had made some bargain about it.

"I—I'd like to leave my machine here," he began awkwardly.

"Argh?"

In the moment of speaking Julian had realised that this wasn't a very good way to start asking for a job—and to ask for a job here had been his intention. He climbed out slowly, and found that Fertig had never taken his unaccordant gaze from the Go-devil, over which it was running in a swift, systematic, nose-to-tail examination. The eye which had no cast in it came around finally to the owner standing beside the roadster; the other one apparently went off on voyages of discovery of its own through the open door behind Julian's shoulder.

"Good chassis," was the sole comment. "What did you get it out of?"

"A French racer that belonged to——"

P. Fertig began to chuckle noiselessly and interrupted:

"You don't have to give it away. The Devil himself couldn't tell what this thing was in the first place. Must have had pickings from six or seven cars. Never be recognised again in the world."

Julian got tired of seeing him walk around the Go-devil and prod it. Finally P. Fertig stopped, still grinning, looked out into the street, back at Julian, and just said:

"Well."

"I—I think I should like to keep the machine here," Julian explained awkwardly, "if it doesn't cost me too much. And I've got to have some place to stay, myself."

"Here?" The man's eyes narrowed. Again he sent that quick flash of estimating examination over Julian's expensive clothes. He seemed to weigh his good manners.

"I went to 139 Branch Street to see if I could get a room," Julian elucidated; "Mrs. Kaylor said she hadn't any for me just now, and suggested your place for the machine."

"Oh—she did." Fertig took that into his consideration. "Well—that's different again. What is it you want—a place to stay nights?" He blew out his inquiry oddly, and watched for Julian's reply, which was suggested by the form of Fertig's words.

"Yes. You're an all night place, aren't you?"

"Well?"

"You have to have somebody stay here nights? I think maybe I——"

"Argh?" Fertig was staring at him again—if one took a chance and judged by the direction of the good eye. "What you mean, stay here nights? This ain't a lodging house."

"I'm looking for a job," Julian spit it out at last, half angrily.

"Y' are?" Fertig seemed to resent the statement. "Well, say, did you know that there's only about a thousand has beat you to it?—all a-running to get a job around the Exposition—take it away from some man that lives here."

"I'm not looking for work at the Exposition," Julian said stiffly. "I thought perhaps you—I know more about machines than anything else."

"About machines, argh?" Fertig grinned. "Yeh—that thing you're drivin' looks as though you knew too much about machines. Whadja say your name was? Where you from? Ever work as chauffeur—or mechanician?"

"McCulloch. Las Reudas. I've driven my own car and cared for it. I helped build this one over."

"Argh, the devil!" said Fertig. "They ain't any work like that at night, keepin' garage—nothin' but change a tire, or pump in some gas—or wash a car 'casionally. Stiff I had here'd shut up and go to bed in the back room—wouldn't even answer the telephone. I got onto it and fired him."

"The back room?" Julian glanced at a half-high partition in the further corner of the place.

"Bunk or two in behind there, and a place to wash up. Sometimes some of the boys stay here; sometimes I stay, myself. But I don't see a guy that carries the side you do making a hang-out of my shop."

"I'll set my trunk in now." Julian got down and began unlashing his dust-coated luggage. P. Fertig, hands in pockets, watched him loweringly.

"Ain't looked at the room," he cautioned. "*You* won't stand for it."

Julian loosened the last knot. Fertig got out a toothpick and chewed it nervously.

"Want to wash machines?" His inquiry was fairly jeering. "Most o' the washing comes at night."

"Certainly." Julian swung up the trunk and started for the door of the room, aware that Fertig followed every business-like movement.

"I don't pay anything. Lots of nights you could sleep right through; but your lodging's all you'd get from me—that and a place to keep your machine. I'd split fifty-fifty on the washing of a car; and maybe the fellah that you washed for would give you an extra quarter—argh?"

Julian went on in with his trunk and set it down. This corner, cut off from the main room by an eight-foot partition, had still the naked concrete floor underfoot; naked concrete walled the outer sides, bare pine the inner. There were two cot beds, several wooden chairs, a table with a solitaire laid out on it, some beer bottles, half-burned cigars, a tobacco jar and a bunch of cigarette papers. A frowsy, nondescript place, like its frowsy, nondescript owner; yet it offered space for his trunk, a basin with running water for washing, a small, dim looking-glass. And it was certainly about the last spot that any one would look for Julian McCulloch. It would answer for the moment. It must.

Fertig trailed him back and forth until the last piece of luggage was off the roadster. When the Go-devil had been rolled into place by the wall, he still followed into the room and stood around there, gaping while Julian opened his dressing bag and laid out his things for washing. It was noon. For Heaven's sake, didn't the fellow ever eat anything? Why didn't he go and get his lunch? Julian was hungry again, and in a hurry, just making himself decent for the street; yet his hasty toilet operations produced a strong effect on P. Fertig. The man looked from him to his bags, he even sidled up against the shelf where Julian had found lodgment for some of his dressing things, and fingered the monogrammed back of a brush. He threw the remnant of the toothpick away, and whistled a little under his breath, then stopped that to remark inanely,

"Maddy Kaylor sent you here?"

"Yes." Julian was ready. Fertig got himself out of the room, walking sidewise and a little in front of his new lodger or assistant. Julian, with his long legs and considerable stride,

U WATCH ME," SHE SPOKE TO JULIAN AS THOUGH SHE
D NOT HEARD FERTIG. "I'LL GET RID OF SOMEONE
AT ONE-THIRTY-NINE, YET."

felt as though there might be danger of stepping on him, or running into him. "May I use the phone?"

"Sure." Fertig sidled off toward a stripped chassis, squatted down and picked up a wrench as though to work on it. Julian, getting his number, became aware that the proprietor of the garage was listening intently.

"Mrs. Kaylor," Julian said, "is that you? About the room: thank you very much, but I needn't trouble you now. I've found a place."

"You have?" Then, without hesitation, "Where?"

"Here, at the garage you sent me to."

"At Pete Fertig's garage? You're kidding!"

"I don't mean a room here. I've got a job. I'm to keep the garage nights."

"You're to— Oh, Mr. McCulloch—you—working for Pete Fertig—in that dirty old garage? The idea!"

"It settles the question of a room—for the present, anyhow."

"Oh, it's only temporary? Well—that's not so worse. But—why—say—can't you come up for a minute? I can't talk to you over the phone. I've got several good rooms on the string for you. You'll not stand Pete's place long. Come on and look at these rooms, anyhow."

"I was just going out for my lunch."

"Have something to eat up here with me."

"Thank you very much, I think I'd better not—to-day. And we'll let the matter of the room rest, for the present."

"Good thing you ain't paying for that phone by the hour," Fertig spoke in. "You'd have a bill."

"Good-bye, Mrs. Kaylor," said Julian, and hung up. Without a word to Fertig, he started out to get some lunch. He could feel the garage man's curious inspection as he passed. Certainly this place was not promising. He stopped at a news stand and bought the morning papers, and searched the "Male Help Wanted" columns while he waited for lunch.

Barbers were in good demand. House and sign painters seemed to be needed. Paper hangers could get work. Finishers, bushelmen—trades whose very names were unfamiliar to him—had bids. For that man who could "put in a little money" there were all sorts of offers of partnerships in enterprises connected with the Exposition. The one practical thing he knew—

the care and driving of a car—was in request; but just now the only way he dare use that skill was in some such obscure place as Fertig's.

Yet, his meal finished, he was somehow reluctant to go back at once to Fertig's. He would walk a little; and so in dazzling sunshine he climbed to the very top of Telegraph Hill, and stood there a while, looking out over the bay. The feeling was strong upon him that he had got into another world. He was strangely free from the torment of thought. He found himself almost dropping asleep, and concluded it would be better to go back to the garage and lie down. If he had to be up to-night any he ought to get some sleep now.

The cock-eyed man met him with,

"The lady up at One-thirty-nine's been phoning for you again."

"Has she?"

"Seems you made a date with her for the movies to-night."

"That was before I came here," Julian said shortly. "It'll be off, if I'm to keep garage for you."

"Oh, don't let me stand in your way." Yet it seemed that Fertig brightened a bit.

"I'll phone now to say I can't go." Julian yawned.

"Needn't. I'll tell her," Fertig offered. "I'm in the crowd to-night."

Julian just nodded and, yawning again, started for the room to lie down. He was so sleepy that even that sordid spot was attractive.

"I drove most of last night," he explained to Fertig. "Left San Vicente about one o'clock. Wake me when you want to leave."

"Ya made it from San Vicente after twelve?" Fertig went and stood before the Go-devil with his hands in his pockets. "Well, she's a damn' good little machine, at that—if she is a crazy patch!"

Julian took a look at his cot, spread his overcoat on it, drew a clean handkerchief over the pillow, lay down and was almost instantly asleep. He slept soundly in spite of noises in the outer room. He wakened only partially to artificial light and Fertig washing up, making ready to leave. Vaguely he realised

that the ivory hairbrush which was travelling over that dingy, sandy poll was his own. Half awake, he asked,

"What time is it?"

"Eight o'clock," came the mumbled reply. "Good brush you got. I'm off now. You ain't likely to be disturbed, but you better leave the door open so you can see into the outside room."

He must have been sound asleep once more almost before Fertig was out of the room.

The feeling of something crawling on his cheek dragged him reluctantly up from a delicious sea of unconsciousness. He stirred and brushed vaguely at it. There was a titter. Then again that tickling on his face. A suppressed voice said,

"Let the poor fish alone. Leave him sleep."

So much he heard; he was going under again when another voice spoke, a woman's this time, and the titter was all through her words, half strangling them.

"I'll not do it. I'm going to wake him up—and take him along with us to the movies."

"Maddy wants to wake him with a kiss."

"Wants to? I guess I'd kiss him if I felt like it—oh!"

He opened his eyes and stared up at Madeline Kaylor, very smart in black satin, with a feather she had evidently pulled from her hat and been using to tickle him. Back of her was a crowd of strange faces.

"You've got callers, Mr. Julian McCulloch!" She seemed to think it the best joke in the world. "The whole push from One-thirty-nine Branch Street—in to make your acquaintance. Mr. and Mrs. Parker, second floor front."

Julian sat up, and finally stood; Madeline paid no attention to Fertig, but went on presenting people to him.

"Bill Ranke and his wife, Dolly, who have my first floor front. Bill's a railroad engineer, same as my first husband. I belong to the Brotherhood yet."

" 'Course you do—too many perfectly good men in the Brotherhood for you to pass it up," light-eyed, light-haired Dolly Ranke shrilled at her, and got a laugh for it.

"B. Goldstein, shoe salesman;" she shoved forward a thin, stooped man with glasses; "his daughter, Minnie—stenographer to a big law firm—same floor back. With Fertig, third floor

back, and an I-talian trained nurse in front, that's my whole lay-out."

It was very funny. Julian couldn't keep from grinning as he shook hands with one after the other. The ceremony complete,

"You've had your sleep out, haven't you? Come on. Go with us," she urged.

"Thank you, Mrs. Kaylor. Didn't Mr. Fertig tell you—I'm keeping garage?"

"Sure, I told her," growled P. Fertig from the doorway. "For God's sake, break away! You'll make us late for even the second run if you don't get a move on."

"Shut up, Pete." Madeline, flushed, excited, looked handsomer than she had that morning. "If you want to go, Mr. McCulloch, come along. Pete can lock up the place. Or what's the matter with leaving him to keep his old garage, if he wants it kept?"

There was an outburst of snickering.

"Ain't Maddy the limit?"

"Waddye know about that?"

But the crowd began to get out, Fertig protesting as he let them past.

"Of all the gall! Right in a man's own place. Come on, Maddy; aw, come on."

After they were gone Julian tried to get to sleep again. Last night alone on the cloudy mountain top, he had seemed to turn some sort of spiritual corner; he had got an intangible but very real release. The sense of it had lasted all day. He had been hungry, busy, sleepy. He hadn't been in the least put out by Madeline Kaylor and her crowd coming in on him that way. He had only thought it funny; it had made him laugh. Now, alone again, with the lights out, he was cast back suddenly into black depression

It wasn't the squalid surroundings, the miserable bed; in the dark there imagination peopled the room with other figures; the wrangling group in the Willis kitchen; Lynnie, head down, refusing to look at him. If he sighed and turned on his pillow and tried to forget—he was in the dining-room at home, his father and mother quarrelling over him, telling him that he'd be arrested if he tried to obtain a licence to marry Lynnie. Flinch-

ing from that, he got the library—the final scene of disaster—and beyond it Lynnie's eyes in the last look she had given him.

The torturing riddle of her eyes in that last glance asked itself in a hundred ways.

And then a machine coming in for garage room, a red-faced man who wanted to know where Pete Fertig was, and made a score of sharp-eyed, short-worded questions concerning the new assistant, brought Julian broad awake; and when he went back to his bed he could sleep.

CHAPTER XX

AT FERTIG'S GARAGE

JULIAN waked unrefreshed, having slept in his clothes. Outside there, hammering and clanking; the sound of men's voices; for a bewildered moment he thought he was in Thatch's place back in San Vicente. Then his gaze wandered slowly down from the high, cobwebbed ceiling of corrugated iron, along a dirty grey wall, to a concrete floor. Dim light coming across half-high partitions showed the other cot, the battered furnishings, his combs and brushes on the shelf there, his overcoat and cap hanging on a nail. This was Fertig's garage, in San Francisco. There, trampled on the floor, lay the silly feather from Madeline Kaylor's hat.

He shut his eyes once more and lay still. Again and again, in the night that was past, he had started broad awake out of dreams of Lynnie, her little cooing voice in his ears, her soft lips speaking against his cheek; flung himself over with a groan and buried his face in the pillow. He could stand it to be kicked out of home, to be moneyless, to live in this sordid hole and work hard among repulsive surroundings and associates; but O God! how was he going to stand it not to have Lynnie—never to see her any more?

Finally he sat up. He'd got to get something to eat. Tingling discomfort demanded a bath; he'd take clean linen with him, and get one before his breakfast. Fertig stared at him and his handbag as they went.

Coming back an hour later, bathed and fed, he found Mrs. Madeline Kaylor making up with clean sheets that cot on which he had slept, vivaciously abusing Fertig while she did it.

"You make me tired, Pete. What the dickens is the reason you've got to be a hog just because you're a man? The idea of him stuck down here in this dirty old joint, and a slob like you having my nice good room that's kept as clean as a pin!"

She glanced up at Julian in the door, with a startled, "Good morning, Mr. McCulloch."

While Julian put his bag away and hung his cap on its nail, she worked in vigorous silence. Fertig shuffled out of the room; her glance followed his departure; the moment he was beyond earshot she straightened up and put her hand in her pocket. "This came in the first delivery, in one to me." She held out a letter addressed in Thatcher Dye's handwriting to Julian. "Politeness of Mrs. Madeline Kaylor, 139 Branch Street." He took it and, with, "Pardon me," turned on the light and read:

DEAR JULE:

I hope you got there all right and everything all right here except we had one merry old time when your pa and ma got back to the garage last night. Don't think he had a warrant and think that was just to throw a scare into you. Your mother wouldn't speak to me at all but he done me up good and proper. Far as that went I just stood and took it. I suppose he doped it out he had a license to be sore. Thought best to say to them both that I knew where you was at and could put my hand on you any time there was anything doing. Your father did not offer any money but thank God he hasent went back on putting the capital in here with me and if you need any you know where to get it don't you Jule? Think it will be a good plan for you to hang on where you are and let them simmer because if you ask me they are sure to quarrel with each other pretty soon. Never knew it to fail. And then they will both be after you with some sort of a living proposition. My saying this to you who are their son may seem pretty raw but you know what I mean by it and you know I have your interests at heart and your parents are all right I suppose and I've got no business saying anything to their son about them. But d—— such parents anyhow. I guess I better quit. Write me Jule when you have time and tell me how you are getting along and give me your address. I am sending this to Mrs. Kaylors with the idea that you took a room there as I don't believe you could do better. I am taking the agency for the Steadfast and may be up in San Francisco after machines and if I do will surely call.

Your friend,
THATCH DYE.

"Well, not meaning to pry, or anything, what's Thatch got to say for himself?" Julian instantly knew she had found a way

to read his letter. It was in a lower voice that she said, "I had a stepfather. He was a fright—used us all mean. But he ruined my brother Wally's life. You—you poor boy—what are you going to do?"

"Well," said Julian, with no sense of embarrassment, "a job first. I'm answering some of these," and he showed her his marked newspapers. She took and held them, staring doubtfully at him.

"D'you think you better?"

"Why not?"

"Well, you risk a commitment."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Thatch said in his letter that they threatened arrest."

"Yes, they'd arrest—to make me go home."

"It ain't a question of your going home," sharply. "Don't you know, boy, that if they arrest, you've passed out of their hands? All they can do then is to commit. You'll be in the hands of the law then."

Julian drew his brows together.

"What can the law do—with me?"

"Commit you to a reformatory—the preparatory school to hell—where you'd have just as much rights as a convict in San Quentin. Oh, I know it can be done, for my stepfather did just that to my brother Wally—when he was no more incorrigible than any other high-spirited boy—and sent him straight to the devil."

"I—see," said Julian slowly, looking on the floor. Then he lifted his head and glanced around. "Well, thank you very much for coming down here to make this place habitable. And thank you for warning me— I didn't know."

"I saw you didn't," shaking hands in good-bye. "That's why I spoke. Well, you know now what you're up against. And, listen, don't hesitate to call on me if you need me."

After she was gone Julian sat a long time at the table, Thatch's letter spread out before him, pen, ink and paper to his hand, but not writing. . . . Ought to have gone further than San Francisco before he stopped. . . . Too late to think of that now—he was stuck here. After all, distance didn't count much; there was the telegraph—detectives—plenty of money. But did either of them want a son in a reformatory? Would either

actually pursue him? If they should, a hole like this of Fertig's was as good a place as he could think of to hide in. . . . Over there, on the other side of the world—in France—chauffeurs needed to drive ambulances. A man's work—danger in it—adventure—some nobility—some atonement. . . . But he couldn't—leave a country that held Lynnie—he hadn't the right. And his atonement was here—here where his heart was.

Julian very soon found that the only patronage of the garage which seemed to interest Fertig came from men who drifted in on motorcycles, in dirty little flivvers, or on foot, to talk in lowered, confidential tones with the proprietor. Sometimes of an evening a crowd of such would get together in the inner room to play cards and drink beer. Julian was asked to join them. He tried out the first occasion, and ducked the others. Yet he didn't sleep well; and when he was there alone he always welcomed the break of some one coming in, even if it were only one of Fertig's pals who left a message, or backed a machine into the place. If a car was brought to be washed, he flew at it eagerly, hosing off, rubbing down, polishing. He had a continual feverish need these days to be busy with his hands and feet; working at something, going somewhere; he tramped the streets when there was no other outlet.

That first sight of Fertig grooming his dingy poll with a monogrammed brush had warned Julian not to leave such things lying about. Combs, brushes, manicure implements, were made free of, not merely when he was out of the room, but Fertig or his friends would walk over to the glass, pick them up, and use them while he was there. Small articles disappeared. Ties vanished, handkerchiefs couldn't be laid down safely. He took to tossing things into trunk or suitcase, but even after that—not having locked anything—he missed a pair of opera glasses. Well, he wouldn't have much use for them the way he was living now. Still he thought he'd better turn a key on his stuff, and got a sly grin from Fertig and a half surly,

"Gettin' kind o' crafty, ain't yeh?"

Life had settled down to a numbing round of working on autos, washing them at night, lying in the squalid, noisy room to rest or sleep, answering cautiously, with no success whatever, some advertisement that seemed to promise a job he dare take, when, one morning, just after he got back from his breakfast,

in walked Thatch Dye—and all of San Vicente, Las Reudas, the hollow back of the house, Siloam Valley, walked in with him. Julian turned from the bench at which he was working and stared for a moment while the here and now reeled dizzily away; then he laid down the pliers, drew a deep breath, and went forward.

"Hello, Jule!" Thatch hailed. "I was here—while ago—to see you. 'D he tell you?"

Thatch and Fertig stared at each other with mutual distaste. The cock-eyed man mumbled something about "Forgot it," and Thatch suggested,

"C'm on outside. I've got some several things to spiel about."

Seated on a bench under a big willow beside the fountain in the Square, Julian felt Thatch examining him narrowly before he said,

"Well, kid, I b'lieve you're looking better."

"I'm well." Evidently the humiliation of the past weeks, finding out bit by bit that he couldn't earn a living, realising what a poor thing he had been to offer himself to Lynnie as a man—a man—didn't show on the outside. "I'm well enough," he repeated; "but, so far, I haven't found work—none that pays anything."

"Oh, that's all right," hastily. "Don't hunt for nothing—yet a while, anyhow. I guess maybe I said too much for your folks in that letter o' mine. You see, it was just the morning after you left; I was kind of excited."

"I made allowance."

"Glad you did," Thatch laughed uneasily. "Glad you ain't expectin' too much. Your father *has* finally come through with the money for my garage. What held things up so long was your ma being afraid some of it would get to you. I give that to you flat. It's better for you to know where you're at with 'em."

"Yes."

"Well, at that, kid, all you got to do is to lay low for a spell. I don't think right now your old man 'd set the police on you—unless she starts him up again. I kind of think he'll do the decent thing by you—some time—if she lets him. But don't you take no chances like lookin' for work. Sit tight. If you

stir around too much, and they just do happen to be after you—How's your money holdin' out? Got any left?"

"A little."

"I'm honour bound not to hand over any of their money to you; but they can't hinder me stakin' you out of my own." Thatch dug down in his pocket, brought out two ten-dollar pieces and offered them. Julian shook his head.

"I don't need to borrow from you yet a while, Thatch. I would if I had to have it."

"Aw—well, then, don't call it a borrow. There's them tires that was left at the garage—worth more 'n twenty."

"Well," Julian took the money. "I'll pay it when I sell my machine."

"Going to sell her? That seems too bad. Oh—I see where you're right, of course. You've got no use for her here in town this way—and when your old man comes through you can get you a better one."

Julian's eye followed the flight of a sparrow skimming over the face of the fountain pool. He was going to sell the machine in which he and Lynnie had driven so many times, the little roadster that had made possible all their happiness. That's what it meant to him—not just wheels and rods and pistons, an engine and a chassis. Oh, well—here he sat in the sunshine with Thatch, the twitter of birds overhead, the noises of Italian town around them. The past was past. Of course he was going to sell the Go-devil if he could.

"Something phoney about that joint over there, Jule." Thatch was speaking. "Gee—he's a bad-looker! Take it from me, the place ain't on the square. There's not floor space enough to make a living out of an honest garage; he's got no agency. When you come to trade, watch that gink, or he'll cheat you out of your eye teeth. You ought to get as much as three hundred or three fifty for that roadster."

Julian nodded vaguely.

"Say, did I tell you I've got the agency for the 'Steadfast'? Soon as I get started in I'm going to make some tests—stunts, you know—going up bad hills with it or a road race or something. Rather have you with me for mechanician than anybody I know. That'll put some money in your way."

"I'd like it," Julian said.

"Well," Thatch stood up, "I'm taking down a seven-passenger to-day—sale as good as made already. Like to have you see that car—she's a beaut. But I'll have to hustle if I want to finish up the business I got and have her in San Vicente before dark—and I sure don't want to get a scratch on her. I'm as nervous over it as if it was a new baby."

"Not going up to Branch Street at all?"

Thatch shook his head.

"She feels a little——"

"Aw—Maddy takes too long!" Thatch was half sheepish. "I'm always up here on business. Got to go over on Golden Gate Avenue now." He looked at his big silver watch. "D'ye say she's going to give you a room pretty soon?"

"Yes—but I don't see how I could take it, unless I can get something to do. She's been very nice to me."

Thatch nodded, grinning.

"Good ol' Maddy! You get the room up there, and I'll feel all right about you. But don't you go hunting any work—there's more money where that twenty came from."

Julian watched Thatch off down the street; a stockily built, sturdy, independent figure—Ben Dye's son; not much education. Thatch didn't care whether his trousers bagged at the knees or not; he wasn't over particular about his finger nails; but—he'd stuck it out and got the money for his garage; he was making his way in the world; and he could marry his girl when the time came.

Thatch rounded the corner, out of sight. Julian caught himself in a great, choking sigh, as he turned and walked slowly, heavily toward Fertig's garage. Thatch was right about the place, and Julian could have told him so. It was a fence, its real interest machines that came in at night, generally with the marks of a long, hard drive on them, to be hastily taken apart and built over in such a way that they could not be recognised, the job hurried through between midnight and morning. At first Fertig had shown a disposition to keep the new assistant from seeing anything of this irregular work; said he had friends coming in and wanted the place to himself. Julian went over and sat reading in the little branch library, coming back to find Fertig lying on the second couch, his eyes shut, but not, Julian was sure, asleep. He turned in, himself, and was roused out of

his first sleep by the sounding of the bell outside. He started up—by mere habit.

"Lay still. I'm goin'," Fertig called sharply, as he ran out.

Julian rolled over and went to sleep again; yet through his dreams there threaded the voices of men out there talking; clinking; hammering; and in the morning there was a partially dismantled machine in, and Fertig reluctantly said he could help at the rebuilding that was going on if he wanted to, and be paid twenty-five cents an hour—provided he was found to be worth it.

Julian was keen for the chance to earn something. He got into his overalls and set to work. After a time the pulling to pieces of the machine they were on, the exchanging of parts and fittings, seemed to him too wanton and imbecile. Finally, when they were winding up the job, he said,

"I don't see that you've helped either machine."

Fertig was down on the floor, the lever of the jack in his hand; he sprang up so suddenly as to be startling.

"You ain't paid to think—anything!" he said between his teeth. "I never done any thinkin' about that crazy patch of your'n. What you want to do, young fellah, is to keep your eyes open and your mouth shut—see?"

This was what he could have told when Thatch said that the joint was phoney. At the time, he had shrugged it off without further words. It was none of his business. He was no policeman. He was in trouble himself—in hiding, liable to arrest. A fence, a thieves' hangout, was about the place for him.

As weeks passed and he still asked no questions about anything, he realised that Fertig's watchful uneasiness abated. They came to pay him double rates for these hurry-up night jobs; the money was welcome; for though it seemed to him that he lived as cheaply as a human being decently could, his small resources somehow melted fast. Mrs. Kaylor appeared at the garage nearly every day; when she didn't come in person, she was sure to ring Julian up. If this chanced to be when he was out, Fertig always gave him the message with a crooked grin, for which Julian would have liked to punch his head; but so far there was nothing to put a name to.

One evening as he stood with her in the garage door, she making her to-be-continued adieus, Fertig, leaning hands in pockets against the corner of his desk listening with that twist

of the lips that always set Julian's bristles up, he reminded her unintentionally that he couldnt' take a room in her house till he got a paying job. He hadn't foreseen that this would start her off scolding that Fertig didn't pay him anything. She spoke her mind on the subject, in a good, loud tone.

"That's right," Fertig put in, "crab at me. I'm getting so used to it I'd miss it if you didn't do about so much of it every time I see you."

"You watch my smoke," she spoke to Julian as though she had not heard Fertig. "I'll get rid of some one up at one-thirty-nine, yet. There ain't a soul I could dump now—without just throwin' 'em out. Not but what I'd do that, too—if I had a good excuse. Fact is, I'm just too doggone popular."

"Yes—with yourself," growled Fertig, coming to the front as a machine turned the corner, signalled and wheeled in.

"And with you, Pete—don't leave yourself out. You've been in love with me, and your room up there at my house, ever since you set eyes on the both of us."

She nodded to the men in the car. They were habitués of the garage, and as such known to her. She lingered in the doorway, looking back at Fertig and Julian, who had got to work on the auto, jacking it up, prying off a flat tire, and finally called a reluctant,

"Well—good-bye."

Julian straightened up to bow; Fertig muttered something under his breath, without raising his head. She went on, and the men up front looked after her and said in a tone Julian didn't like,

"Which one was the lady calling on?"

"Not on me, you can bet your sweet life!" Fertig's hammer glanced and gave his knuckles a rap, so that he burst into heartfelt profanity. He said no more till the man in the back of the garage, who had been listening, laughed tauntingly; then Fertig began a grumbling, out of which Julian got only bits,

"'F that dame thinks . . . 'm gonna pay salary to every honey boy she picks up . . . 'nother think a-comin' . . ."

"What?" Julian was across that car and standing almost on top of Fertig before he knew he had moved.

"Yah—go to it, kid!" yapped one of the men. "Bend Pete's

face in for him. Been needin' it quite some time." But the other roared, running from the back of the shop,

"Drop that wrench! No beatin' him up with tools!"

Fertig, squatted on the floor at Julian's feet, sighting up at him, grinned feebly.

"Argh—g'wan—y' big stiff—where d' y' get this fight stuff? Can't y' take a joke?"

"Not that kind."

"Can't, argh?" Fertig was scrabbling to one side. "I'll not make any more like it, then—'f you say not. Darned if you ain't the tallest man I ever seen!"

"What d'ye know about that!" The first man was disappointed. "Aw, don't be yellah, Pete—fight him! Put it all over you—in yer own place. Fight him!" And the other came in disgustedly with,

"Why, you poor prune, ain't we here to see fair for you? Hop to it, now. Give the dude what's comin' to him."

"Shut up! Who asked you to butt in?" Fertig hunkered down again by his wheel. Julian went back to work. It was ridiculously like two chickens who had offered at each other—and then walked away in opposite directions. He saw the men grin and make signs of derision behind Fertig's head.

Julian wondered a little. Though he was taller, with longer reach, he couldn't believe Fertig was physically so much afraid of him as all that. Funny, anyhow. He liked the cock-eyed man the less for it, too.

When he had been in San Francisco a month, coming along Stockton street one evening, he stopped at the crossing of Pacific and looked into that short, wide way. Because of the Exposition, San Francisco's police were putting the lid on the Barbary Coast. He turned and walked down a block, crossed, and was coming back on the other side when he saw before him a girl whose figure and walk seemed familiar despite red sweater and bobbed hair. Dancehall girl—he glanced away absently and was passing, when,

"Jule—Jule McCulloch!" she hailed, and he turned to find Rose Daggett.

The spots of rouge on her cheeks, her painted lips, belonged to Pacific Street, yet in the moment of meeting she was just the Rose Daggett of last summer.

"Well—say!" she peered up into his face in the dusk. "You're one I never did expect to see down on the Coast, Jule."

"No?" he answered at random. To him they stood there, not two but three. Himself and Lynnie in the bell tower of the Mission; this hardy little outlaw who had climbed up at the risk of her neck to warn them; driving back from San Pablo that miserable morning in the fog, this girl popping up from the side of the road to help him to his stolen day with Lynnie; it was she who had guided him to Lynnie on the Ridge the night of the fire. She was looking at him curiously as, without another word, he started on. She hesitated a moment, then fell into step beside him, saying with a little laugh,

"Y' ain't askin' how I come to be here. 'Member that soldier boy of mine back at San Pablo?" Julian remembered. "Brought me up here—and ditched me. But I ain't gettin' along so worse. Going to be in town a while, Jule?"

"Living here." It wasn't easy to speak to Rose at all. What she brought back to him was so present that he hardly knew which words he'd utter.

"Living here—you are? Left home?"

"Yes—a month ago."

"Oh—I see." She walked beside him, silent for a moment, then looked around with that curious, direct drive of hers into his face and said, "Had a bust with the old folks; up here raising hell to get even with 'em. That it?"

They had reached the corner where he would turn. He stopped and lifted his hat to her silently.

"Where now?" she asked.

"The Gianduja. To get my dinner."

"Uh-huh. You swells do go there to eat tagliarini and raviolis. Coming back over here later?" she hesitated interrogatively. "If you are—I'm in Big Murphy's place—'THE CENTRALIA' dancehall——"

"I have to work to-night," Julian said.

"Work?" she laughed. "Oh, well—that's just as good as any other excuse. Where—for instance?"

"In Fertig's garage, over in the Italian quarter."

"Oh—say!" her brows in a pucker. Then, after a thoughtful moment, "well—you've split with the old folks and spilled the beans for sure! But, gee—you've got no business dirtyin'

your hands with that kind of thing. What makes you—" She broke off, looked at him with sudden comprehension, and came a little closer. "You—you're hidin', ain't you, Jule?"

He nodded.

"I see," thoughtfully. "Coast ain't a bad place to hide, neither. But, say—I got a hunch. You can tear off ragtime to beat Paddy-Risky. What's the matter with me trying to get you a place at Murphy's—to play the piano?"

"Nothing," Jule agreed. "It's what I've thought of doing ever since I came up here and began looking for work."

"Gee, I hope I get it for you!" Rose grinned delightedly. "Anyhow, you come down to 'THE CENTRALIA' to-night. Wear evening clothes. Murphy'll try you out if I ask him to. Course things are slack since the police cut out the drinks. An' at that it's better'n a dirty garage."

"I'll be there."

She let him get a few steps away, then came hurrying back and, when he also halted, stood facing him rather close. The shine from the coloured bottels in an Italian Pharmacy made her dress fantastic in patches of red and purple and green.

"Jule—say"—she half whispered—"is—is Lynn with you?"

She drew back before his look, crying out,

"I didn't mean any harm! Don't be mad. You know I didn't mean any harm. I'm your friend. Ain't I always been? And Lynn's friend, too. I just thought— I just thought——"

"No. She's not with me."

"Well, say—please, Jule—you see your telling me that you'd quarrelled with your folks, and all—I kind of thought it was about Lynn—don't you see? But of course I might have known you—you wasn't going to— You don't know where she's at, do you?"

"She's with her people."

"Oh! Well, when Zen was up here he said the Willises had moved away from town. 'Zat so?"

"Yes."

"Do you know where——?"

"No. I don't know where they went."

"You ain't mad at me, are you, Jule?" She eyed him entreatingly. "You'll come down to 'THE CENTRALIA' to-night just the same?"

"Oh, yes—I'll come. I told you I'd be glad to get the job."

When Julian told Fertig he would be out that night, and why, the cock-eyed man speeded him with,

"All right for you—takin' time off without notice whenever you get ready. Expect me to hustle 'round and hunt up Tim Welch, do you? Have to have somebody to-night—got word—car comin' in—lot o' work to do. All right for you, Mr. McCulloch! All right for you!"

Fertig was a grouch, anyhow, always crabbing over something. Julian supposed he had made his announcement pretty bluntly. Since his meeting with Rose he had hard work to know what it was he did say to people. All the time he was getting ready for "THE CENTRALIA" he was trying hard to hold his mind steady; he dreaded like a whipping being swept back even into the outer edges of that emotional whirlpool she had reminded him of.

At nine o'clock "THE CENTRALIA" dancehall was already full of light and noise; but it was nearer midnight when its proprietor, Big Murphy, a huge, soft-stepping, soft-voiced black Irishman, with the calm of a Chinese idol, announced himself ready for the trying out Rose had mentioned. The weary-looking, hatchet-faced young Hebrew at the piano got up with a sigh. Julian played, was found to be satisfactory, and told he could have a regular job Monday.

"That suit you, Isidor?" Murphy said, as he made the arrangement. And Isidor answered, in a tired, reedy voice:

"Down to the ground. I'm figuring to turn on the gas Sunday night. No flowers, please."

Everybody laughed as he dropped back on the bench and began again to play.

"Leaving?" Rose parted the curtains of a box near the entrance as Julian was passing.

He nodded.

"I got my job. Thank you, Rose."

"When d' ye start to work?"

"Monday night."

"See you then."

Julian lifted his hat and made his way out. Going back to the garage in the small hours, he found Fertig sitting at the outer desk smoking; no one else about. A car he had not seen

before was shoved back in line against the wall. A special job had evidently come in and been run through with Tim Welch's help. The men who had brought it were gone. No sign of Welch anywhere, either; but he found the inner room strewn from end to end with his own belongings. He realised then that he had forgotten to lock his trunk and suitcases. Nothing remained in either. His stuff was scattered so that he could hardly estimate what was missing, and he was too sleepy and tired to investigate. Fertig, still sitting smoking, said nothing till Julian had turned in, then he came to the door and spoke in a sort of taunting tone,

"Not worth while to notice what's happened to your glad rags?"

Julian hunched the covers up over his shoulder.

"Boys—in here while you 's away—borrowed a few of 'em."

"I see they did," Julian said wearily. "Let me get to sleep, can't you?"

"All right—you took a night off—'n they took some o' your junk—there you got it."

In the middle of the next forenoon when Julian got up and prepared to dress, Fertig came into the room and stood looking on a bit nervously as riding breeches, tennis flannels, dinner coats, even a good tweed sport suit were gathered up. Julian saw at last that he had been robbed of all his practical street wear, except one suit, the oldest he had, that was saved by being out at the cleaner's. When he went across in his bathrobe and slippers to phone for this, Fertig stood in the door and listened, then followed back into the inner room, sat down on the edge of his cot and rolled a cigarette while Julian was washing. This thing of asking no questions seemed to get on his nerves.

"What you goin' to do about it, argh? They might bring 'em back, if you'd say 'Please' pretty." Julian finished washing and began to put things into his trunk.

"Them ginks last night, dividin' up your duds, said they guessed it was fair—thought you had too many clothes—and they had too few."

"What's the use of talking?"

"No particular use," grinned Fertig, as the boy came in from the cleaner's with the suit. "You had your soup-and-fish on, so

that's all safe. Might say soup-and-fish is about all you'll be wearing 'f you get the job at Murphy's—argh?"

Julian had no intention of being drawn into a wrangle. The clothes were gone; there was nothing to be gained by it. He only said,

"I've got my job at Big Murphy's. Begin next Monday."

"All right. That means you'll be here three days more—or does it?"

They moved out into the main room. Julian crossed for a can, to oil the springs of his roadster. Fertig sat down at the desk in the corner and began figuring.

"Yes. I'd like to stay. I'll be paid at the end of my week. I can't very well take a room elsewhere till I get the money."

"'S all right with me. Going to keep your machine here after you leave me?"

"I don't want to keep it anywhere, longer than I have to."

Julian added nothing to that for a minute, and Fertig also was silent. From the first the Go-devil had been used on the sly at nights. When Julian read late at the branch library he was liable to come in and find the roadster's place vacant. Next morning it would stand there, dust-covered or mud-spattered; once a lamp had been broken; another time a mud-guard ripped loose and clumsily wired up in such a way as to greatly damage the finish. He pushed the selling of it, and finally got a tentative offer.

"I want to dispose of the roadster," he addressed the back of Fertig's head. "You know I've wanted to sell it, from the first."

"Well, leave it here with me for sale," Fertig said, without turning. "I'll not charge you any storage then."

"I thought I had it sold, myself, day before yesterday. But my man hasn't come back yet."

"What you mean, had it sold?" Fertig glared around at Julian. "You got a fine idea of what's straight—I don't think. Here in a man's garage, where he's tryin' to make a living sellin' second-hand machines, cut under him and make your own sale without givin' him a chance at any commish. Why 'n't you tell me 'bout this trade?"

"I'm telling you now." Julian stood up and looked at him, oil can in hand. "I'm asking three hundred dollars. Your com-

mission on that would be thirty. Whether you make the sale yourself when he comes in, or I make it, you'll get your commission."

"I ain't so much standing out for the commish," yet Fertig got up, looking very dissatisfied; he pitched his bills and papers together, grumbling, "I just want you to know that if you're going into the selling of second-hand machines—or any other kind of machines—my garage ain't the place for you."

This was so futile, considering the fact that Julian was leaving Monday, that he saw no reason to notice it. In the three days that followed, he and Fertig scarcely exchanged a word. Sunday night they were both to be up at One-thirty-nine Branch for what Madeline Kaylor called "a tamale feed." Julian was out all afternoon, and came hurrying in late to get ready for the occasion. Fertig stood squarely in the front door and spoke, while Julian was still on the sidewalk,

"Your friend's been here and got the roadster."

Julian looked past him and saw that the place where the Go-devil usually stood was vacant.

"Well?"

"Well." Fertig echoed the monosyllable. "'S all right, then? He left this with me."

Some coins suddenly exposed on the square, grimy palm showed themselves as two tens and two fives. The cock-eyed man might have been looking at them or at Julian, whichever way one took his eyes, but he certainly was looking queer.

"Told you I wasn't standing out for any commission," he offered the coins handsomely. "Said to him I'd hand th' thirty over to you."

"No, you won't." Julian walked past him and on into the inner room. Fertig followed, and stuck the coins into his hand, wheeling back and out into the garage in a great bluster of anger. Julian let him go without a word, stepped across, laid the money on Fertig's table, and went to the basin, washed, and began to get ready for Madeline Kaylor's party. His elaborate, systematic dressing always seemed a matter of personal offence to Fertig—yet it, and its results, curiously, held the garage man in check a bit. He came back now (Welch, to keep the garage while they were both away, was outside, as Julian could hear), saw the money on the table, and asked gruffly,

"What's the big idea? Why n't you keep your thirty, along with your two-seventy?"

"Did Mrs. Kaylor say half-past seven, or eight?"

"Oh, all right, all right. Eight." Fertig swept up the gold, chinked it and thrust it into his pocket. "'F you want to be a damn' fool, 'tain't my lookout. You was bound to lose that machine—in a town like this—sooner or later. You done well to get rid of it for two-seventy—if you ask me."

Silence.

"Well, you goin' up to One-thirty-nine to-night?"

"Yes—later," said Julian shortly, and Fertig left.

When Julian got up to Mrs. Kaylor's he found, besides Fertig and himself, the Parkers, the Goldsteins, father and daughter, and the Rankes, Bill being in off his run. Madeline Kaylor, in one of her rude romping moods, had the women fairly backed into corners, while she squabbled and tussled with the men, "roughhousing her own party," as Dolly Ranke indignantly put it. Julian watched her—red-faced, her hair half pulled down, throwing cushions, tittering, driving people to overturn chairs—and wished he hadn't come.

Presently her glance, roving round the room, found him. She pulled up in the middle of the racket.

"I'm not going to fool with this bunch of stiffs any longer! Mr. McCulloch, if you'd take me to ride, I'd quit 'em cold—they could have the old party. Be a sport. Do it! Go get the auto!"

"Sorry," Julian said. "You're too late."

"I'm too——" Madeline began blankly.

"He's sold the roadster," Fertig cut in.

"Sold it? Sold his car? Well, what do you know about that!" She turned to Julian. "When?"

"Aw, what's the dif?" Parker grabbed at the diversion. "Point is, car sold—we celebrate."

"Sure," Dolly Ranke seconded him. "Mr. McCulloch's got to take us all out and treat us."

"Or I'll go out with him, and we'll fetch the treat in," suggested Bill Ranke.

Julian, with less than a dollar in his pocket, counted the company at a glance.

"Sorry," he repeated; "but I didn't say I'd sold the machine."

"Come off," grinned Goldstein. "Fertig sold it for you. 'S all the same."

Silence. Everybody looking from him to Fertig. Then Minnie Goldstein said,

"Cuts no ice who sold it. Only question is, who's gotta da mon? Money—money—who's got the money? Whoever has the mazuma 'll have to treat the crowd."

"I'd treat, anyhow"—Julian was getting a little hot over the situation—"but I haven't the money—for the machine—or any other money."

"That means Fertig's got it!" cried Madeline.

"Means nothin' of the sort!" Fertig's denial was almost a yelp.

"It does if I say so." Madeline went close and snapped her fingers under his nose, laughing loud. "Wake up—who's this you're calling a liar? I said you had the money to treat the crowd. Flash your roll. How much did you get for that machine? What was your commish? Speak your piece. Tell the ladies and gentlemen all about it."

For a minute it seemed to Julian as if Fertig would break out on her with something unpleasant. But though she laughed, those round, grey, fiery eyes of hers held him, hard. He began in his characteristic way to ejaculate muttered sentences, his wavering eye describing curious circles as the good eye evaded hers.

"Well—he said he had a customer." A jerk of the head in Julian's direction showed who "he" was. "Said he made the fellah a price of three hundred. I said it was a dirty—it was no way to do, to come into a place where a man makes his living selling second-hand machines and try to get by with a trade that didn't bring him anything.

"Yes—*you!*" Madeline was contemptuous. "Somebody ought to take care of you."

"I can take care of myself, thank you. I ain't askin' anybody to look out for me. But he made a bargain with me that he'd give me ten per cent on the sale. Ain't that so?"

Julian nodded.

"Well?" Madeline prompted impatiently, the others listening, open-mouthed.

"Well," Fertig echoed her word, then broke off suddenly. "So his man—this customer of his—come in and got the roadster and took it away. And that's all I know about it."

"And you're minus your commission," Parker finished up the statement for him.

Fertig flushed darkly, the veins swelled in his neck as he turned a furious look on Julian, snorting,

"Unh-hunh! I see your game now."

"Game? What do you mean, game?" Madeline demanded, then appealed to Julian, "Has he got his commission?"

"He has thirty dollars in his pocket, which he says this man who took the machine paid him," Julian said. "That would be ten per cent of three hundred dollars."

"Well, that's funny!"

"How did it happen that——?"

"Look here," Fertig spoke up desperately, "the man he sold to paid him outside of the garage—'s far 's I know—two hundred and seventy dollars. Then when he come in and got the machine he handed me this thirty and—and—as I un'stood—said it was the balance due."

Only Madeline spoke now:

"Was Mr. McCulloch there at the time?"

"It's none of your business—but he wasn't," Fertig said.

"Nobody there but you? What was the name of the man that bought the machine?"

"I didn't ask him."

"No—didn't need to."

"What do you mean, didn't need to?"

"Because you knew already."

Fertig saw whither he was being dragged.

"What you mean, knew already?" he asked, with helpless repetition.

"I mean his name's Pete Fertig. That's what I mean!"

The room was very still. Fertig didn't attempt to answer. He shuffled where he stood, and looked about him. Julian had been with these people enough to know that the garage man hadn't a friend among them.

"Hip, hip!" Parker whispered hoarsely at his ear. "Here's where Pete gets his!"

"You dirty crook! I'll give you just fifteen minutes to have your junk out of my house. Pull your freight!"

There was a half-hearted outcry of,

"Aw, Maddy!"

"Now, Mrs. Kaylor—this is serious!"

"I see," grated Fertig. "Makin' me the goat—argh? I'm the fall guy. Said you was goin' to ditch somebody—to get a room for—" He checked. Julian, looking at his face, recalled the "honey-boy" taunt the fellow had used that time at the garage, and edged closer, ready for him. But Fertig finished, with surprising mildness—"fer McCulloch."

"Huh. You guessed it."

"S'pose I don't go. I have a verbal agreement with you, Mrs. Kaylor; if your word's good for anything, I could hold you——"

"That'll do!" Madeline shut him off. "Too much is a-plenty of that sort of spiel. I've put up with you long enough. If I'd tell all I know—you'd——"

"For any sakes, Maddy!" Mrs. Parker cried.

"The rest of you keep out of this." Madeline regarded Fertig's scared face with evident satisfaction. "Don't one of you say a word to me. I know what I'm about. Pete, lay that thirty dollars on the table here—as first payment to Mr. McCulloch. You're going to hand him over the three hundred dollars or the machine—do you hear me?"

Fertig heard; he also saw. After a survey of the company, he slouched over to the table and put on it the identical coins he had first offered Julian.

"There," in a sort of whine, "you folks can see it's paid under duress."

"They can see it's *paid*—they're perfectly good witnesses," said Madeline. "That clinches your liability for the two-seventy. Now walk upstairs and pack your trunk."

Without a word more, without a look, Fertig went. There was a breath of relief as the door closed behind him.

"Well!" said Madeline, easily. "That's a mean job I've been dreading for quite some time. Good to have it over. Here's where you get your room at last, Mr. McCullough. Come on, new lodger, help with the tamales and coffee."

CHAPTER XXI

BIG MURPHY'S DANCEHALL

JULIAN never went back to Fertig's garage. He slept in his new room that night, sent for his things next morning, and took the day to getting comfortably settled. About six o'clock he dressed in evening clothes and went very quietly down through the halls, admitting in his own mind that he rather hoped to let himself out without being noticed. But no such luck. Quietly the sitting-room door opened; his landlady eyed him in evident awe. He had seen her floor, Sunday afternoons, littered knee-deep with society pages from San Vicente and San Francisco papers; herself sitting to read them in a sort of grief. She knew the first name of everybody in what she called "the swell set," and took a bitter pleasure in using them, or, better still, the nickname she got hold of.

"Going out?"

"Yes, Mrs. Kaylor."

She came and looked him over for quite a while in silence; at last, wistfully,

"Well—you can't be young but once, can you? . . . Money in your pocket. . . . And there sure ain't many can wear full-dress like you can." It was evidently her thought that Fertig's thirty dollars was starting him off on a career of social dissipation. "Where'll it be to-night?"

"To get my dinner at the Gianduja, then to work."

She looked at him with a flash of resentment; her voice trembled a little as she echoed,

"To work—in them clothes? I wish you wouldn't string me that way. It ain't friendly."

"I'm not stringing you," said Julian; but she went straight on,

"Of course we ain't your kind here at One-thirty-nine Branch. I understand that If you want to go out with your swell friends—you don't have to fix up a story for me. I've got no business to ask questions—but where is it to-night? Something

at a private house? I know you know all those kind of people—you'd have invitations anywhere—just anywhere. Will it be in to-morrow's *Examiner?*"

"Lord, I hope not!" The exclamation was surprised out of Julian. "I tell you, Mrs. Kaylor, I'm going to work."

"Aw," she sighed, and drew back a little, "go along to the St. Francis, or the Fairmont, or the Palace—or wherever it is—those are the kind of places you belong. You never belonged here. And you"—she laughed a little catchily—"even among the swells, you'll have 'em all faded."

"Think so?" His inquiry was dry and cool. "Well, maybe—in Big Murphy's Centralia dancehall, playing the piano."

"I do believe you mean it!" She stared at him blankly.

"I certainly do. That's where the pay envelope's coming from for the room, Mrs. Kaylor. I told you so last night."

"Why—I—I never thought for a minute you were in earnest about it. I supposed of course it was a joke. Oh, Mr. McCulloch, that'll never do in the world! You can't! It's awful."

"I've got my living to earn. This job is what I could get. It's not so bad. I find it quite interesting."

"Oh, don't say that, Mr. McCulloch. I can't bear to hear you. They pretended to clean up the Barbary Coast. No drinking in the dancehalls. And the proprietors own the saloons next door—and what's the difference?"

"Why, none, I suppose."

"Well—I speak to you as a friend. The fascination of a life like that. . . . A young fellow never knows till . . ."

"I'll have to take my chances," he said, and walked out.

The fascination of the Barbary Coast life was real enough; Julian felt it from the first. Fertig's, with its surly, disagreeable criminals, had been merely a thieves' hangout; there his grief gnawed him unrestrained. But in the blackguard license of a dancehall—the desperation, the abandonment about him, he got something that was welcome. Strange how he fitted into it all. Under existing conditions, the adjoining saloon next door was indeed a sort of annex to the "Centralia." No drinking in the dancehall; yet to care for its pleasures a man must drink. Between the dances and the songs of the entertainers they flowed, a steady current, in and out from bar to dancing-floor and boxes. Within a week all the regulars knew him. Barkeepers, waiters,

fellows who played the piano in other dives, drunken sailors, tipsy soldiers, young bloods from the big hotels and fashionable part of town, slumming; the great tide of crooks and hangers-on; girls like Rose—most of them fearfully unlike Rose, with their old, hard, painted faces, short dresses, schoolgirl braids or cropped heads, and shrill voices; they said he carried a lot of side, but they showed they liked him by giving him a nickname—the "Millionaire Kid"; it was the only name he ever went by on "The Coast."

Rose Daggett herself, having got the place for him, displayed a barbarian's good manners, making no attempt to play the patroness, or hang about him. She was just as she had always been, humbly anxious to please, behaving a good deal like a small boy admiring from a respectful distance the big boy. She never again mentioned Lynnie's name to him; yet he could not see her without seeing Lynnie at her shoulder. It hurt intolerably; he alternately winced away from it, and sought it.

He felt a bitter amusement at thought of his mother like a woman prodding with tongs and holding her nose, stirring at arm's length in his little fool, childish affairs—the low books, cigarettes, cards; the getting spiffed with the Daggett gang. Everything she had tried to fight away from him—he was up to his neck in it now. Here it was the way of life; no time to cook and soften existence; you got it in the raw. Squalor that was not covered but increased by reeking perfume; swish, swish, swish of dancing feet; weaving medley of embraced, circling forms; outcry from a curtained box; drinking, yelling, fighting; these were the smells, the sights, the sounds, amid which he sat and played the piano from nine o'clock till dawn, and learned his lesson.

It seemed there was wisdom (knowledge, anyhow) to be had in such places. Well, his mother had talked as if he might have got information from the dirty books, the dirty crowd. Plain, ground-fact information in plenty here. Nobody ran and screamed at the mention of things that decent society was supposed to cover up. He heard the distinction made between girls who were vicious, and those who had been seduced. God, O God—you never got a second chance in this world!

Madeline Kaylor said no more against his job at Murphy's, though she continued to show a feverish interest in what he was

doing. Once she found a badly slashed coat in his closet and came to him with it darned and pressed carefully.

"Thank you very much," he said, taking it from her. "And I thought the coat was ruined—past praying for. That's a wonder."

He would have let it go at that, but she wanted to talk; and you can't snub a woman who has just mended your coat. She finally got all the details: a girl pursued by a drunken, jealous partner, had taken refuge behind him as he sat at the piano; when her assailant was pulled off, the shoulder of his coat had got the stab intended for her.

"See?" Madeline cried. "What'd I tell you? Might just as well have gone through your heart. You've no business to be in a low-down place where creatures like that hang around you! You'll be killed for one of 'em yet."

She was furious about the girl. She didn't believe it was some one he had never spoken to.

"I don't see why you refuse to let Thatcher Dye get some money from your folks for you. He could do it—some way—without really letting them know. Anyhow, I thought you said he was going to take you in as mechanician for a race or something. Why don't you write him and let him advance you some money on that?"

Julian let her talk. He wished he had checked her when later he found that she must have written to Thatch herself. Mail was shoved under his door in the morning; breakfasting at noon these days, he usually read it before dressing. He stood so to read Thatch's next letter. When he came to the embarrassed, carefully worded excuses—"No prospect of pulling off those Steadfast stunts any time soon," and an offer to lend him money—he was hot all over. That meddling fool of a woman—why couldn't she let his affairs alone? Then, as the last words and the final explanations on the page met his eye, he forgot Madeline Kaylor and his anger at her. He laid the sheet down and stared blindly through the window. Thatch was going to be married.

No reason that that should seem to him a personal wounding. He had always known that Thatch was the kind of man who could earn his living and marry his girl. Yet he hadn't any idea how he got through his dressing and downstairs. It was

Sunday. Madeline called him in and asked him to have coffee with her; and she hardly let him get settled in his chair before she stuck a San Vicente *Messenger* at him with a notice of Thatch's coming marriage.

"Yes, I know," he pushed it away.

"Well, here—I bet you didn't know about this!" She dived down to fish up a *Call,* and gave it to him folded to show the pictures of Zoe Haslett and Pretty Consadine side by side. Sensational headlines announced their elopement. The fury of the two families was played up for all it was worth. Under pretense of sympathy, they were both guyed for threatening annulment of the marriage on the ground that the young people were under age.

"Are they really so young?" Then, while he sat staring, not answering (thinking of Pret and Zoe that day at Liveoak, in their stunning launch, out on the sly like himself and Lynnie—and they were married now—married!) she prompted, "You know them both, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Is she as pretty as that?"

"Yes; Zoe's pretty."

"Much money as the Consadines? Oh, no—I suppose not. It says there that the boy's sole heir to old Asher Consadine. That would mean about five millions."

"Three, I believe. What Zoe has doesn't look very big beside that."

He sat in Madeline Kaylor's over-furnished little sitting-room, the Sunday papers fluttering around his knees like dry leaves, Madeline running into the kitchenette to get his coffee, coming back to serve it, looking into his face to demand, laughing, "Penny for your thoughts," and defended himself with,

"I wasn't thinking about anything."

Pret and Zoe, Thatch and Alma Bruckner . . . himself and Lynnie.

"I believe you were in love with that girl," Madeline ventured, as she set the tray down.

"What girl?"

"The millionairess."

"Zoe?"

Madeline's face cleared at his tone. Julian drank his coffee,

taking refuge from her insistence in the newspaper's war news and Exposition booming.

After the big show opened, in February, and the Barbary Coast began to get a lot of tourist slumming parties, there was hardly a night that Julian didn't pick out persons in at Murphy's whom he had seen in the old days, and even known more or less well. But it was as he had expected: behind the piano in a dancehall no one was looking for Julian McCulloch.

The instrument stood at the end of the room. Just at Julian's elbow a curtained recess, which Murphy called his office, held an untidy roll-top desk, a chair or two, and usually Murphy himself. Bills were audited here; here came all applicants for employment, all the husky-voiced, stubby-handed men who had business of any sort with the proprietor. One night there seemed to be earnest talk in there; Julian heard the sound of two voices in the intervals of his playing. People ventured up, shook the curtains, and were sent away with a growl. When at last the visitor was leaving, Julian glanced around curiously.

There, not ten feet from him, in the curtained doorway beside Murphy, middle-aged, loosely-built, superbly-dressed, was a distinguished, ugly-looking customer. With a shock Julian recognised the big head, its stiff fell of grey hair parted exactly in the middle to hang in two thick curves over the temples; the potato nose and brilliant eyes—Cass Hardwick, from San Vicente, his father's legal man! He stooped, reaching with cold fingers for another sheet of music. Murphy and Hardwick were still talking together, not glancing at him. He steadied himself; one of Murphy's prized barkeepers had been arrested a day or so ago, joy-riding in San Vicente. Murphy turned back into his office; the man from San Vicente stood a moment within arm's reach, surveying the dancing floor; then, just as Julian had begun to breathe a little more freely, shot a look full at the pianist. Julian's heart stopped beating; but somehow he kept his fingers moving on the keys. The lawyer stared at him, frowning intently. It was not till he had turned and walked toward the dancers with the air of a man released to his own pleasures that Julian remembered his father's good-humoured jeer at old Cass's nearsightedness, and his being too vain to wear glasses. Though more than once during the hour that followed, while Hardwick disported himself between the saloon next door

and the "CENTRALIA" dance floor, going to it like a common sailor, or a rookie from the Presidio, Julian half believed that inquiring glance flashed his way, nothing further ever came of this, and he never saw Hardwick in the dancehall again.

On a wet night in the latter part of April—the rains held late that year—Julian sat in the small hours watching the drabbled crowd come in off the streaming pavements. Suddenly he was aware of a group of four young swells among them, Pret Consadine in the lead, pallid drunk, an odd, dancing light of madness in his blue eyes. While the girls swarmed to them, Julian slammed ahead with his ragtime. Now he saw the bunch, now he lost sight of them.

Nearly fifteen minutes later he was startled by some one stopping at the end of the instrument, holding to it, staring; there was Pret, a girl hanging to each arm. He shook them off, leaned a little closer to the piano, plainly getting his eyes to focus.

"By God—I know who you are!" he said unsteadily. Then, "Come a-along out and have a drink. Take one-a these girls—I got too many girls."

"Thank you," Julian answered, without intermitting a beat. "I have to play now, Pret. I'm hired here."

Pret threw back his head and laughed wildly.

"Hired!" he screeched. "Damned if that ain't the best joke! You—hired to play the piano in Big Murph's! What does he give you, Mac? Come on—I'll buy you out—we'll make a night of it—what?"

The girls, standing by, stared.

"That's all right," thumping steadily. "Nobody here just now to take my place. Some other time——"

"Murph!" Pret called. "Hi, Murph!"

The big, soft-stepping, soft-spoken, black Irishman appeared in the doorway of his office.

"Yeah?" he smiled.

"Murph, d'you know who you've got hired here? 'S bes' joke. Why, man, this is——"

"Don't use my name," Julian cautioned.

"What? Wha—? Oh, all right. Travelling incog"—his voice lurched—"nito. All right. Jus' 's you say!"

Murphy's face quietly disappeared from the doorway. The

girls closed in on Pret again; he went miawling and wavering on with them. Julian sat at the piano and slugged, mechanically. Good thing his hands were trained to act of themselves. The thinking part of him continually escaped to another time—another place. . . . Turning in at the Loma Prieta gate, Lynnie beside him in the roadster; Pret's white speedster sheering past so close it seemed he must take off a mud-guard; smell of beach apple; treble and bass of surf. Thump!—slam!—shrill cries and lights—Big Murphy's dancehall sounded and shone vaguely on the edge of an inner consciousness that was taking him up to the Forest Lodge, that sat down with Lynnie at a table outside its window and heard the others inside there talking. . . . Zoe and Pret holding apart from the crowd—really in love. . . . Well, they'd married. . . . He glanced far down the room at that grimacing, screeching, wild-eyed, shameful apparition—a bridegroom of a month. Poor Zoe!

"Don't tear it off so fast, kid," a soft voice admonished from Murphy's recess. "You'll have 'em winded."

The dancehall girls clung thick about Pret and his crowd. These young wasters turned Big Murphy's place, of which he boasted that it was the quietest on "The Coast," into a riot. Rose Daggett—meeting no success, it seemed—had come and leaned on the piano across from Julian, jeering,

"Look at 'em! See Anita hanging onto that little rotter. Just you wait till Danish Sam gets in here—there'll be doings!"

"Danish Sam's on cruise." Julian had automatically made the proper correction in tempo.

"His boat's in; Nita's wise to that; she just can't bear to let easy money get away from her."

Anita, a dancehall girl, and Danish Sam, who was frenziedly jealous of her—Pretty, who had been married a month ago, and now came down to stir up that jealousy—Julian shrugged it off. It was no concern of his.

Tinketty tunk—play the piano—that was what he was hired for—not to think! "Ye ain't hired to think," Fertig had said there in the garage. He wasn't hired to think. No—nor to feel, or care. The nearer he came to being a mechanism the better for him. Sometimes, on nights like this, the noise and the lights and the smells all hummed and blazed and reeked together till it was like the numbing of an anæsthetic. He invoked that

now. It held him—and his muscles kept up the dance measure—even through an outburst of cries, shots, the herding of the dancers to one end of the room. The thing that broke through was a stinging, burning pang in his side. After it a discordant crash of the piano keys as his head hit them—or did the keyboard fly up and strike his forehead? Nothing more for a time.

Down on the floor—a vague feeling of hands pulling at him—the shrill, yapping cries of the girls—the grumbling, muttering under-note of men's voices. The room seemed to pull out and close up like a concertina. Why was he on the floor? How did he get there? When the room opened and shut that way the noise opened and shut, too—loud and low; low and loud. Something hurt him somewhere—oh, it was in his side. Rose Daggett squalled at them to get away and let him have air. Yes—they crowded in like animals—he was afraid they'd step on him.

He looked straight up past them all to the ceiling of redwood beams and panelling. Little spirals of smoke curled about up there. The lights made lanes through it. And, straight down one of those lanes came a little blue gingham girl. He watched her walking there in the air, over the heads of the others, as she'd walked toward him through the field of wild flowers in Siloam, and knew that when she got near enough for him to touch her she'd vanish—dissolve.

Suddenly Pret's face bending over him, white, sober; Pret's voice, shaking, whispering, but sober, too,

"God, Mac—has that fool killed you?"

He would tell Pret not to call him Mac, that way—not in any case to use the name McCulloch down here. . . . It all swam past him and Pret wasn't there any more. It was Big Murphy's voice that first said softly, "Here come the harness bulls," and then melted and grumbled and crumbled away into a murmur of, "—quiet place—what's the use of a man trying to——?"

There were policemen over yonder making an arrest. He saw a man with a smoking pistol in his hand—Danish Sam. But the way that heavy lock of hair fell across his forehead—the lift of his lip that showed a gleam of white teeth, though—who was he like? Oh, Tony De Vega!

Then it didn't seem to be Murphy's dancehall, quite. It was partly the Portugee dance in Siloam Valley, and Tony De Vega

THERE WAS AN OUTBURST OF CRIES AND SHOTS AND THEN A STINGING, BURNING PANG IN HIS SIDE

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with a gun. He closed his eyes for a moment; when he opened them again, there in the middle of the place, pushing through the crowd, were white-jacketed men with a stretcher. He was being lifted to it. Wow, they hurt him!

"What's this man's name?" the voice demanded of Murphy.

"Don't know," was the big Irishman's smooth, slow answer. "Goes by the name of 'The Kid.' "

The jarring of the ambulance, the lifting out, a white-capped nurse in a corridor. He was on a bed or a table or something; there was the smell of ether, then a great sea of ease, and release, out of which he was dragged by the doctor probing for the bullet. He fought with that, and it seemed quite a while till he was in a cot somewhere, and a nurse was hanging up a card over it.

Afterward he slept or was unconscious.

CHAPTER XXII

ONE-THIRTY-NINE BRANCH STREET

THROUGH days that were like nights, and nights that were like days, not numbered or distinguished, it seemed to Julian that he was absurdly lying in a big bed in the third floor front room at Madeline Kaylor's.

Magic was the sole atmosphere of this time—black magic of the pain in his lungs every time he got his breath; white magic of the little blue gingham girl with her fair, delicate face, the bright braided hair round her head like a small, close wreath—the little blue gingham girl who had come down the ray of light in Big Murphy's dancehall, and disappeared cruelly when she got near enough for him to put out a hand to touch her. She seemed mysteriously, invisibly, to have gone with him to the hospital. Her face, like a remote star, but very distinct and smiling, was the last thing he saw as the ether took him on the operating table. She didn't forsake him through the brief time that it took Madeline Kaylor to get to the Emergency Hospital, secure permission and bring him up to One-thirty-nine Branch. There it seemed that something unexpected happened, something that came on with a chill one night. But even in the front room up on the hill, a doctor standing around with a notebook, demanding the lung history of all his family back to Adam, telling them this was pneumonia, and that his people—if he had any—ought to be notified, Lynnie was still there sometimes, quite as real as the doctor himself or Madeline Kaylor, or Mrs. Sparolini, the Italian nurse, very indignant because she had been turned out of her room, put into his, yet who hung around and kept repeating the doctor's words over after him. Every one seemed to be there. Dolly Ranke walked right up to his bed and nodded at him, ducked her head to one side and seemed to be crying. Minnie Goldstein was around sometimes. Joe Goldstein, her father, came; Bill Ranke, in off a trip, trying to step

softly, breathing hard; little Parker and his wife. And they all said, as though they had learned it by rote from the doctor, or were repeating it after him, as the nurse did: "His people ought to be notified."

What business was it of theirs? It hurt to talk, but finally in desperation, for fear they'd do it, Julian managed to get out a few words. After they were out, and seemed to be sitting in a foolish little row in front of him, he noticed that they were a child's words, and not the grown-up article. They squatted there, and he sort of read them over after saying them. They read:

"Don't tell anybody."

Madeline Kaylor—in that same blue-flowered kimono she had worn the first morning he saw her—looking at him, her eyes bright as though they might have been full of tears, seemed to understand. She nodded and said,

"I won't."

Julian let his eyes fall shut.

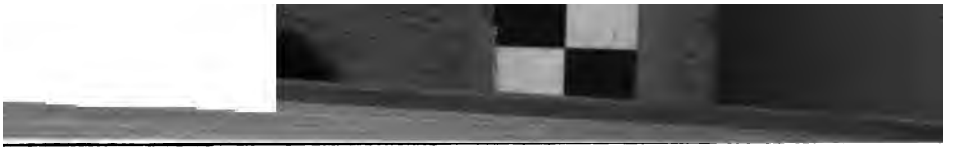
"Well, if you've got the courage." That cackling voice from the other side of his bed was Mrs. Sparolini's. "You know well enough that when the doctor left he thought you was going to telegraph right away." He opened weary eyes on the lamplit room again, the faces of the two women beside his bed. The house was very still. It seemed to be deep night. These two alone with him. His fate in their hands. "Well, if you've got the courage," the Italian woman repeated.

"Courage! Oh, sure. I've got the courage to do anything this boy wants me to," Madeline Kaylor said. "He told me not to send for his folks under any circumstances."

"He doesn't know what he's talking about." How he hated the nurse for saying that! Ugly little hen of a woman, pecking around! Hens got their necks wrung. He'd like to wring hers. She *would* squawk!

He knew well enough what he was talking about, though people did swim into his knowledge and out of it queerly, and the little blue gingham girl mingled with them in a way that was unusual—at least, it hadn't been so before—while time passed at a gallop or seemed to stand still, and the pain in his lungs was a thing to be lived through with each breath.

Then, quite in the middle of things, Thatch Dye was one of



the people who bobbed up in the room without any reasonable explanation of how they got there. It was morning. Julian, roused by the sound of quarrelling voices, lay and looked through his lashes and saw Thatch and Madeline all glimmering; she, red in the face; he, standing with his feet planted very square and a little wide apart, just inside the door. Maybe it really was Thatch this time, for when he spoke what he said was,

"Why 'n't you send for me before, Maddy Kaylor?"

"Because I knew you'd do just what you say now you're going to do—run right to his folks with the whole business. I don't see what you've got to say about it, anyhow. I——"

"Aw, shut up, Maddy. Let me speak to him myself."

Thatch's face, very anxious, bending over him, Thatch addressing Maddy still, not him. "Is he sensible? Will he know me?"

Maddy just sniffed, standing at the foot of the bed, not touching it—she was too good a nurse to lay her hand on it unless it was to do something for him. Thatch's knees came against the side rail and jarred him, but Julian couldn't afford to speak to him about it. He only rolled his head on the pillow. Maybe Thatch would understand,

"You know me, don't you, Jule? You know me."

That was a fool thing for Thatch to say. Why shouldn't he know Thatch Dye? He was glad when Mrs. Kaylor interfered, because it hurt so infernally to speak. She used just about the words he would have used,

"Of course he knows you. What's the use of talking to him like that? Move, please. I want to get in here with this hot-water bag for him." A moment of silence, warm things coming against his feet; then, in a sudden flare, "If this boy doesn't want his parents told—they'll never get told by me!"

"Huh—well—you're a whole lot fonder of responsibility than what I am, Maddy. When'll the doctor come in? I'd like to hear what he says about notifying them."

Madeline began to cry; just regularly boohoo. It was up to him, Julian; he had to commence dragging out words again, to answer Thatch. With laborious pains he got them ready—three of them. Thatch bent down inquiringly.

"Not—twenty-one," was what he said.

At first Thatch didn't seem to understand—just looked around sort of scared. Then, suddenly,

"Oh, that don't count now, Jule. You needn't think of that now."

Julian knew he had to speak again.

The words—down in there somewhere, like little cross dogs—didn't want to come up. It seemed he hadn't breath enough to feed them to coax them forth. When at last they did jump out and bark, "Not—twenty-one," they bit him, too; chased him down into a horrible black pit from which he crawled up slowly, slowly, slowly, to hear Maddy saying,

"Fainted dead away! Now, for goodness' sake, are you satisfied, Thatch Dye? See what that talk does to him. I can take care of him. He'll not be in any more danger in my hands than he was there at the hospital."

"Well, what do you say, Mrs. Sparolini—you're a trained nurse and used to things like this—what do you say?" Julian, floating back from distance and darkness, was dimly sorry for Thatch—he was awfully scared and anxious. But the Sparolini woman—listen to her—she was answering,

"You got to think about it—what if he dies? Anybody wants to be with their son when he dies."

It seemed to Julian that he held himself back where he was, halted between consciousness and unconsciousness, wilfully refusing to return to a place where they were discussing what his father and mother might wish to do if he died. He longed to put up some sort of fight. Having gone through so much for the chance to live to himself, it was a frightful feeling to lie with closed eyes while those fools cast lots as to whether he should be allowed to die to himself. But he couldn't; almost he gave up hope when he heard Madeline say,

"You shan't do it. Those people at Las Reudas have got no rights—the way they've treated him." And after it Thatch's mutter,

"They've got a right to foot the bills here. This is going to cost a whole lot of money. I see where I was wrong not to make 'em shell out for the boy before. Jule wouldn't be in this fix if he'd had money to live like he ought. I blame myself——"

"Well, blame yourself some more, then!" Madeline cried. "For God's sake, get out of here now—you talkin' money and Sparo-

lini talkin' funerals! Get out, both of you, if you can't do better'n that."

That seemed to settle it. From then on Madeline Kaylor, with the help of the Sparolini woman, nursed Julian through what he afterwards knew was a very serious attack of pneumonia. After the worst of it, when Mrs. Sparolini had gone out on a case, the tedious days strung themselves into weeks, and Madeline Kaylor was a wonder; she seemed never tired, or in the least out of spirits. She asked no help of any one. Indeed, she seemed jealous of the others, and they complained to Julian when he was better, well enough to see them, they said, that she had timed their visits and turned them out of his room.

He was neither glad nor sorry for that. Life seemed to be dimmed a bit, inside and out; there was a vagueness over everything. He just lay there, not thinking, not feeling, not seeming to live entirely—a kind of vegetable existence that seemed to dull pain, and memory of pain. Nights, now, he slept like a baby. If he dreamed, and of Lynnie, the dreams were vague and sweet. When he got able to sit up part time, Madeline put him in a big chair by the front window with a down puff over his knees, and he sat there and dozed, and the past—the pleasant part of it—walked in and out of his room as gently, as kindly, as Madeline coming to bring him trays, to sit beside him with her sewing.

The hands lying relaxed on the arms of his chair weren't very thin, but he had a reluctance to move them to help himself. A languid feeling of drowsy compliance kept him eating and drinking and sleeping—and forgetting. The fiery demand for an ability to say yes and no to life seemed gone, or in abeyance. His thoughts swam one into another as sleep into waking.

The city roared full of Exposition, and Exposition visitors. Extra ferries had been put on for them. In the evening when they had fireworks out at the Fair, the bay would be lit up, with a gigantic glow and reflection in the sky. All at once he began to gain fast. There came an afternoon when the doctor definitely discontinued calls, saying they could phone him if he was needed, that all danger was past and no use adding to expense.

Thatch chanced to be there that time; he had been making it once a week during Julian's illness. When the doctor went he

attempted a sort of apology for having been so determined that the people at Las Reudas be notified. Julian wouldn't let him finish. He didn't blame Thatch any more. But none the less Madeline Kaylor had earned what he told himself then was his undying gratitude by the stand she took.

If her bluff, bullying manner ever got on his nerves—her "Behave yourself—do as you're told—just a kid—and a sick kid, at that—I've made bigger boys than you mind—" he reminded himself of this one thing she had done for him, and forebore.

Yet, that very evening, after Thatch was gone, she came and tossed onto his bed a little bundle tied up in a girl's handkerchief and he was near quarrelling with her about it.

He knew what was in the handkerchief; he turned out from it, with a jerk, a tiny wrist watch on its bracelet; two goldpieces —a five and a ten. He had seen them taken from his pocket at the hospital, and known that tough, good-hearted Rose Daggett must have tucked them there as he lay on the floor at Big Murphy's, when they didn't know whether he was killed or not. She had risked that much to help him, if he were going to live—or peraps to pay his funeral expenses if— Down on Pacific Street you talked considerably about your funeral, and the expenses thereof. Madeline looked at him across them with raised brows.

What was the dim, cloudy memory of her having shown him the watch before—back in the nights of pain and delirium and asked him whose it was? Had he answered her then in audible words, or had he only spoken to the little wraith that belonged to those times? Last summer at Siloam . . . he might so easily have given Lynnie a watch like that . . . or a very much better one . . . last summer at Siloam. Cheap skate—cheap skate!

"Put them away," he said now, impatiently. "They're not mine."

"Neither the watch nor the money?"

"Neither one."

"Care to have me return them to the owner?"

"No."

"Owner likely to come after them?"

"Very unlikely, I should say. I'll hand them back to her when I'm able to be about."

"Oh, you will?" But Madeline didn't put them away as he had told her, she laid the little watch on his bedside table near his own, and dropped the two goldpieces into the table drawer. He knew well enough she did that to nag him into saying something more about them.

He wouldn't give her the satisfaction; he let it lie there on his little table and taunt him with memories of that day in San Pablo buying clothes for Lynnie. He'd felt himself generous —if he thought about it at all. Why had he stopped with two or three little purchases? Oh, he had been a cheap skate!

In fiery accusation came back to him Lynnie's rapture over the gifts he did bring her. He choked with the pity of it. She had never owned anything like them before. Oh, God, let him get well—give him another chance!

The shooting down at Murphy's happened during the late spring rains. Julian's memory of being carried to the hospital included the smell of wet pavements, the drum of drops on the ambulance top. It was the middle of the dry season when he was sitting one evening by his window in his big chair, waiting for Madeline and the supper tray. As he waited he was intensely conscious of his body; as though he thought with his muscles instead of with his mind, and those thoughts were of increasing strength. He dropped his head back against the pillow, not weak at all any more, just lazy, his eyes half closed, getting the far reaches of the bay in a paley green glimmer.

The sky above was faintly blue and rosy, all the distances swam in an evening mist that had nothing to do with fog. Lights lay in lines through the bay cities across there; they were springing up on this side, too. As he glanced down into Branch Street, noting them, he was suddenly roused and brought sitting up straight in his chair by sight of a figure which turned the corner and came on toward One-thirty-nine—a girl with bobbed hair, who carried a red sweater over her arm.

She came straight on, as though she had been here before and knew just where to go. His window was down, and he lost her when she was under it. A red sweater and bobbed hair meant Pacific Street and marked her up here on respectable Russian Hill as an undesirable alien. He heard the bell sound downstairs, and thought he'd go across to the table and get the handkerchief package and have it ready when she came up. He

made rather slow work of it. When he had the things tied securely, got back to the window and pushed it up so he could look below, there was Rose coming down the steps—leaving. Madeline Kaylor had turned her away. He knew that was it, as he leaned out to call to her.

"Hello, Jule," she looked up. "Say—it's good to see you at last! How they breaking for you?"

"Fine." He showed the handkerchief-wrapped parcel. "I know this is yours. Thank you for offering it. I didn't have to use any of it. Come up and get 'em."

He waited for her to turn back to the step. She stood and looked up at him, laughing. Finally she took hold of her skirts on each side and held them to catch.

"All right," she said. "Let her go." Then, as he made no move to throw the watch down, she explained with an extra grin, "I've found out that I ain't wanted in there—as the feller said when they throwed him downstairs."

Julian heard Madeline open the door back of him. He tossed down the little packet. Rose caught it deftly, calling:

"Big Murphy sent his best. He wants to know how soon you're coming back to 'THE CENTRALIA.' Everybody down there's strong for you. Coming back, ain't you?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"As soon as I'm able."

"See you then. So long!" And Rose went on.

Julian turned. Yes, there Madeline was, pulled up short in the door, face red, eyes snapping.

"Done with your visitor?" she asked, came across and set his tray down, getting about with a sort of staccato movement, stopping to look at him again as she shook out the napkin and offered it to spread over his knees.

"Yes," shortly. "Rather lucky I chanced to see her."

Madeline was bending over the tray, picking up dishes, and setting them down with extra emphasis. She straightened up and stared; he knew she was torn between a desire to let go of her temper and consideration for him as a patient. She reached over and jerked the sash down, demanding:

"Don't you know you daren't sit in a draught?"

"I know you asked me whether I'd have the window up or down before you left."

"Oh!" getting a little redder. "And what do you mean lucky you saw that—that— Well, I'm a lady. I can't call her what she is."

"It was lucky because I wanted to return her watch to her." Without another word Julian began on his supper. Madeline made a pretense of tidying up a room already as exquisitely neat as hands could make it.

"So that was who those things belonged to!" It came out finally. "She didn't mention any watch to me—this evening, or before."

"Then she's been here before?"

"None of your business!" trying the high-handed joking manner. "Eat your supper. I suppose she's one of the dancehall girls from Murphy's."

"She's from Las Reudas." Julian was paying more attention to his meal than to Maddy. After all, he didn't care anything about the matter. "Her name is Rose Daggett. She got me my job at Murphy's."

"Oh! Knew her before you came to San Francisco?"

That was a strange tone. Julian, glancing up, found Madeline's face very serious and a little pale.

"Yes; the Daggett Grocery's just back of our house in Las Reudas. The first time I ever ran away from home—when I was four or five years old—it was to play with the Daggett boys."

Such a long silence that Julian had to notice. Still that queer expression on Madeline's face, and she blurted out,

"Did—did this girl come up to San Francisco at the same time you did, Julian?"

"No." At last he understood what she had been getting at. Madeline looked at him and cried out,

"Don't get mad at me, Jule, please! I didn't mean to make you mad. I'm as liberal-minded as anybody. I know young fellows have to have some rope. But even if you did bring that girl up to town—or she followed you up here—you don't need to— Why, I heard your voice just now, and you spoke to her as respectfully as if it had been me—or any other lady!" Julian leaned back in his chair and stared angrily.

"I tell you Rose Daggett got me my place down at Murphy's," he repeated. "You wouldn't want me to act the cad to her, just because she's a dancehall girl."

"Yes, I would!" Madeline exploded; she was still setting dishes off his tray, arranging the little table, nervous, apprehensive. "Those kind haven't any rights."

She seemed a little scared after she had said it, and fussed uneasily about the room while he finished his supper in silence. Of course he was under mountains of obligations to Madeline, but if he had to take this sort of thing on account of it—he was done. He wouldn't owe money to a woman who talked to him like that. Not another word was said between them till she was piling the dishes on the tray to take it away, when he asked her very quietly if she would give him fifteen minutes that evening for a little business talk. She looked at him across the dishes appealingly.

"Thatch Dye's going to be here this evening," she said.

"Certainly. I know that." Julian couldn't help it that she didn't want to talk money with Thatch around. He was depending on Thatch to help him out. He had asked for the doctor's bill so many times that Madeline finally told him she had paid it up to date—and then refused to say what the amount was. He'd get it all to-night. They'd allow her the salary of a trained nurse, Mrs. Sparolini had been paid, too; they'd find what the rent of this front room was, and estimate what his board ought to be for all these weeks. They'd have to allow at least fifty dollars for extras—medicines, things that had been overlooked. Of course the total would be something appalling. Madeline was supposed to have been collecting from Fertig for the roadster, but she had to admit he had not paid up entirely yet. Julian lay on his bed in house jacket and slippers, and waited for Thatch. The roadster's price—or as much of it as they could get out of Fertig—would cover what it would cover; he'd rather owe money to Thatcher Dye than to Madeline Kaylor.

The interview, when it finally came, was illuminating. Thatch and Madeline sat beside his bed at first, but when things were coming for her too hot, she got up and fussed around the room, or stood at the foot of the bed, or looked out of the window, wiping her eyes with her handkerchief and talking about its

being hard for people not to be willing to accept what was offered freely, arguing,

"And it isn't as if I was really giving you anything, Jule. It's just loaned. A boy like you—sick this way—why shouldn't you borrow from a friend?"

"What makes you cry when I add it up, so I'll know how much it is that I have to pay when I'm able?" he asked wearily.

"Because you look so cr-cross," Maddy sniffed.

"Well," Julian was getting deadly tired. "I've always been told I had a bad disposition. I don't mean to be cross; but I do mean to pay you; and it would be a relief to my mind to know what it is I've got to pay, when I am up and able to do it."

"Why pick on me?" Madeline asked sullenly. "You might as well talk about paying Consadine."

"I'm going to pay Pret, too—but you first," Julian said impatiently.

"What's that about Pret Consadine?" Thatch broke in. "Did he lend you money? How much? I hope you got enough. I never thought of him. We might—? He ought to 've——"

"I think it was a hundred and sixty-seven dollars that Pret had in his pocket above taxi fare back to the hotel," Julian said, remembering the white-faced, shaking boy beside his hospital bed, the turning out of pockets, the protestations that he wanted to pay. Pret had been scared to death lest his own people—Zoe particularly—should find out about his part in the shooting. "A hundred and sixty-seven dollars," Julian repeated, "and part of that went to the hospital, I suppose. Madeline would know how much there was left."

"Shucks," Thatch said regretfully, "that's nothing, with all that's had to be spent here. What say we get some more from him? 'Twas the little fool's fault you were shot."

"I don't want to borrow any more from Pret," Julian settled that.

"I shouldn't call it a borrow," Thatch grunted. "You don't ever expect to pay it back, do you? I wouldn't."

Julian let that go—for the time. He asked Madeline to give Thatch the items, furnished the list he had made out, and Thatch began to figure. Madeline was called away downstairs. Thatch looked after her with a grin.

"No use hurrying to pay *her*. Got the worst case on you

ever saw her have on anybody—and that's sayin' plenty. She won't thank you for payin'. Let her wait."

Pretty crude of Thatch. Julian spoke stiffly:

"Pay them all as soon as I can—but her first. I'd 've let the doctor wait if she hadn't got to it before me and settled with him. As it is, you're the one that'll have to wait."

"Sure," Thatch said. "Let that run as long as you please. Only wish I could advance you more, Jule; but you know how it is when a man's in a new business—and just got married. Money's scarce with him."

Julian was silent, glad he hadn't suggested borrowing the full sum from Thatch to pay Madeline. There was something back of it all. Thatch looked uncomfortable. Finally he came out with:

"You know who ought to foot all these bills."

"Don't say it," Jule shook his head impatiently. "You couldn't understand what you're talking about, Thatch. You've never been under fear of arrest." His voice was bitter with remembrance of nights when he couldn't sleep for the thought of being dragged publicly to Las Reudas, by legal process, as an incorrigible; the possible horror of a reformatory. Thatch stood looking at him, red, embarrassed.

"Well, might—anyhow—just feel out the situation for you—with your father, I mean, hey? I don't think you need be uneasy about him."

"I don't need to be uneasy," Julian echoed doggedly, "but how can I help being? I know them better than you do."

"Well—at that—they've got a lot of money. By George, Jule—you—" Thatch spluttered, helplessly indignant. "I guess—You're their only child—you've got some rights!"

"I suppose I have," Julian admitted slowly, "but I can't say that I want to hold out for them. I'll take care of myself—if I don't have to hide from their cursed policemen. That'll be over, next September. At the worst, I've liked being on my own up here in San Francisco better than I ever liked living at home."

After Thatch left him he sat for a long time, thinking. It all came round to the one conclusion: he'd run no risks; it was Big Murphy's dancehall for him till he was twenty-one and free to look for a suitable job. And if he were going back

to Murphy's, the sooner the better. He got his evening clothes and brushed them. Maddy came up with his supper, found them laid out, and was positively hysterical. Night work, in his state? Why, it was as much as his life was worth. She succeeded in keeping him at home that evening, in getting him to go next day and see the doctor—who confirmed all she had said: there must be time given for his recovery to steady down. This rush of vitality he felt would break if overloaded. And it hadn't really needed a word from either of them; his own body, the feeling of his own flesh, told him.

He came back to One-thirty-nine very sulky. Madeline—as different as possible from the Madeline who sentimentalized and romped, intercepted him in the lower hall, got him in her own sitting-room, and talked to him earnestly.

"Jule, dear," her voice shook with emotion. "I'll be frank with you. I've known from the first that you'd have to take time to get over this pneumonia. You're weak as a rag, right now, ain't you? You take two or three months to get strong. I can put up the money for it. I'll lend it to you—just like I'd lend it to a brother. What's the matter with it?"

He knew what was the matter with the arrangement—but he couldn't tell her. Didn't want to be under obligations to her? He was that already. Nothing for it but to grin and bear his position as her protégé—till September.

CHAPTER XXIII

ENCOUNTERS

IT was the fourteenth of September and his twenty-first birthday that Julian must wait for. When this date came around he would have been a year in San Francisco. In all this time it seemed to him the longing for Lynnie, simple, primitive, like hunger and thirst, had never lessened. He was used to having it, when things were going pretty well, blow over him in a gust that just to see her again—to look at her—even if she wouldn't look at him—would be worth all and more than he could ever achieve here. Through his illness and delirium her presence was such a reality that, when convalescence robbed him of it, it was like losing her again. In times of discouragement his old grief rolled back on him, the very climax of despair.

At One-thirty-nine every one was very good to him. Working people, hustling at affairs of their own, they showed him little kindnesses and then let him alone. It was only poor old Madeline who was fated to take advantage of his obligations to be oppressive—intrusive. He got away from her, and from a city full of Exposition visitors, and spent his days in the open. He used to cross the Sausalito ferry, take one of the little lines out into the Marin hills, and tramp for hours. He had all Muir woods to hike through; as soon as he was strong enough he climbed Mount Tamalpais. When he crossed the bay to Berkeley, he shunned the University grounds, making for the heights beyond. Every now and then he saw at a distance some acquaintance, and, as he gained health and poise, was continually prompted to go ahead and meet them as he had been used to.

It was within a week of that twenty-first birthday that he went down to Palo Alto. Stanford had been open nearly a month. He stood watching the student crowds on the campus; nobody he knew. Turning to go he was clapped on the shoulder, and swung around to meet Bench Prentiss's outstretched hand. The

red-headed one had been graduated the year before. He was doing temporary work at the University as an instructor.

"Been sick!" he cried. "I'd never think it. Why, Jule, you look great."

"I feel great," and with the words came their first realisation. Never before in his life had he experienced the inrush of vitality that had followed on the heels of his convalescence. He was impatient to get at life—to begin building up. And he hadn't known, till he shook hands with Bench, and they began to talk, how much he had missed some one of his own sort to speak to. Benchy wanted to take him up to his frat house, and when Julian said no to that, they went to a little cafeteria and had something to eat. Bench was too good-hearted to make any mistakes in the subjects of conversation he chose; though he had a good deal to say about what life meant to men in the early twenties, none of which touched anywhere what life had been meaning to Julian in the last year. There was a certain pleasure in hearing now the names of the old crowd, for whom Julian hadn't cared at the time.

"Pollards are living in their own house in Las Reudas, you know—next door to your folks," Benchy began.

"I didn't know."

"Yes. Paula's with your mother a great deal. That girl's had a hard time of it. Sticks to her father through thick and thin. Man like that . . . And I thought a year or so ago that Paula was selfish. Tell you, Jule, there's a noble woman."

Julian nodded. Three years younger than Bench Prentiss, as he listened to the red-headed one's credulous enthusiasm, he felt like an ancient. Of course Paula Pollard stuck by her father. What else would she do? A girl of her sort stayed by her father till she got a husband to pay her bills. She hadn't the sand to be a newspaper woman like her Aunt Dale.

"You've heard where Calk is?" Benchy was watching sugar dribble from the shaker on to his berries.

"Yes, in Belgium, with the relief work."

"I'm proud of Stanford. Old grads like Calkins—and plenty of students, now. You might think being a Canadian, that I—But we can't all do the same thing— Say, Jule, they're trying to turn the McCulloch factories into a munitions works."

"I hadn't heard of it."

"Yep. I don't know how your father stands. Your mother's against it. Anti-war—anti-militarism—of course a good many women are."

It was a between-time at the cafeteria. They had the room to themselves, except for a bored girl up there behind the food counter. Distant voices came to them from the campus. Benchy leaned across the table and spoke low.

"Tell you why I'm so crazy about this munitions project, Jule. There's a fellow with an invention—high explosive—biggest thing that's happened for fifty years—a hundred—since gunpowder was invented. If that fellow's got what he thinks he has, 'twould end the war—like that!" with a snap of the fingers. "Country that controlled it would be masters of any field—any field. If it could be taken up in your factories— Gosh, what a feather in California's cap! My mother's been working like a little tiger—to bring your folks round. Gee! I hope we succeed. You see I want to get into that, myself. I've got to have some sort of a man-size job; and that'd be almost the same as going to the front. More value to the Allies, if anything."

He came back to this again and again. Julian could see the athlete, the born fighting man, struggling between a desire to follow out his natural bent, and some stronger, restraining instinct. "More value to the Allies, if anything," Benchy would repeat. "And a man could be working for a future—and—well, a home."

Benchy had one home in San Vicente, with his mother. For whom was this pressing need of providing another? If it was Paula Pollard, Benchy had his work cut out for him. Even as that thought crossed Julian's mind, Benchy spoke.

"It doesn't seem to me, Jule," the red-headed one argued, "that money—big money, anyhow—makes for happiness in marriage. Does it to you? Look at Zoe and Pret."

"What's the matter with Zoe and Pret? Aren't they getting along?"

"My God, no! 'S awful. Going to be a divorce there; everybody knows it."

"Well," Julian said, "you have to have some money. Maybe they have too much."

"That's it." Beachy nodded his red head. "You said something then. 'Tis much as he had as too little."

On the evening of his birthday, a few days after his talk with Beachy, he walked into Madeline Layne's sitting-room wearing a chauffeur's uniform. She jumped to her feet and looked at him with the cry:

"Oh, Julie—what's this?"

"Got a job," he explained laconically. "A hundred and fifty per."

"Julian MacCulloch—a chauffeur!"

"Pay's good—for a beginner."

"Where're you going to work?" tragically. "Around the big hotels and at the theatres. You'll see everybody you know."

He laughed.

"And about the first week when you get your pay envelope you'll be leaving Branch Street, I suppose."

"Oh, no, I think not." Julian looked around the room with its imitation ormolu, its multitude of fancy cushions and spreads, its dingle-dangled curtains—it had come to have a certain claim on him as home. Yet what he said was not, as he thought of it afterward, very gracious. "I'll not make any move, Madeline, till I've paid my debts."

"Does that mean me?" her lip trembled. He didn't say anything, and she finished shakily, "You needn't be in a hurry, you know—about me, anyhow."

Thatch's exact words. Julian wasn't in a hurry. Good thing, too, for it was going to take time to get those debts all paid. He would let the matter of leaving rest, even after he had her paid. It seemed a little hard to go—she was so tremblingly afraid he would.

Winter passed; spring; still living at One-thirty-nine Branch. If he made any move, he felt that it ought to be a big one. One thought was bitter to him these days; here he was, doing what, if he could have done it a year and a half ago, would have won him Lynnie, saved their love alive. For she had loved him—at first. She couldn't hold to the thing that he showed himself to be. But she had cared for him at first.

He paid his debts in installments; as he could. When Madeline stood hefting the last of the coins he handed her, looking

half regretful, she asked him outright if he'd paid Pret Consadine, and when he said he had she scolded.

"Why would you do a thing like that?—you, working hard at a job that's not fit for you—and that little wretch just rolling in wealth!"

"I don't know that Pret's a wretch. I don't know that whatever he rolls in has anything to do with my owing him money."

"Don't know he's a wretch? Well, look in the papers then."

Julian had no need to look in the papers for information of the forthcoming Consadine divorce case. Scandalous details, decorated with Zoe's picture in polo rig, had for some time enriched the news columns; but the knowledge thrust upon him was more recent, and first-hand. In this work of his he had grown used to seeing persons whom he knew, and quite indifferent to it. Some failed to recognise him in his chauffeur's place and dress, or having recognised didn't care to acknowledge the acquaintance. But Zoe, flashing about from one smart function of the very fast Consadine set to another, in her splendid purple limousine, always knew him, and always spoke to him. It was after the divorce case was set for hearing that he one day saw the purple car come in on the Post Street side of Union Square and stop. Zoe herself leaned out, located Julian, dismissed her man, then walked over to his taxicab. There was paint on her face; he didn't like the gleam of her eye as, without a word, she opened the door and stepped in.

"Where to?" he finally asked.

"Hell—or some nice place like that," flippantly.

He took another look at her. He'd get nothing reasonable out of Zoe in this mood. They couldn't sit here in Union Square and argue. He wheeled up the Powell Street hill to Bush, and turned west for Golden Gate Park. Before they had gone many blocks she leaned forward to talk. She'd got hold of something about the shooting at the "CENTRALIA" and didn't believe her lawyers when they told her there was nothing in it. She wanted the bottom facts from Julian.

"Men always hang together," she flung out. "But you wouldn't shield a thing like Pret Consadine—would you, Jule, after all I've suffered from him?"

"Zoe," he said sharply, "sit back there and don't talk to me till we get off the city streets."

He heard the sniff with which she complied. But the moment they reached a quiet drive of the park she called, "Stop here." The wheels had hardly ceased to move when she was out and around, climbing into the seat beside him. He started on slowly.

"Now, Jule, you've got to tell me."

Dryly he gave her the facts of the shooting at Murphy's dancehall, finishing with:

"Why do *you* mix into this, Zoe? Let the lawyers do it. They'll get your divorce."

"You wouldn't ask if you were a woman!" bitterly. "That was right at the first . . . A bride . . . And he'd made me just one of a line of—of 'em."

Julian was silent, sending his machine at a snail's pace along the solitary way, thinking of that night at the Emergency Hospital, Pret sitting on the side of his bed crying, afraid Zoe would find out—they'd already quarrelled—she'd turn him down.

"Well," she broke in on him, "say it. I suppose you think I've got no more than was coming to me—marrying a drunken little degenerate for his money—" Her voice failed for a moment, then she went on defiantly, "That's what I did. I never cared the rap of my finger for Pret Consadine."

Julian didn't like her for saying that. Pret was a poor proposition; she couldn't well be loyal to him. But she lost out when she was so disloyal to love itself. And they had loved each other; she needn't deny it; he had seen them. He sat looking straight ahead while the girlish voice, hardened, reckless, went on and on, accusing Pret, justifying her course. Julian only felt impatient to get her back to town and leave her at the Fairmont, where she was living. It was the last he saw of her for some time; after her verdict she went down to her grandparents at San Vicente, and he heard no more. Thatch Dye had been his one link to the life down there; and now, being himself at work, his obligation paid, Thatch's business and domestic affairs taking up more time and attention, they had less communication.

It was an August night, near the close of the month, when he sat in the waiting line near the St. Francis. The day had been warm; now the tepid air was whipped to life by chill streamers of fog that blew in through the Golden Gate.

As the starter in front of the hotel signalled Julian's machine in its turn he felt, for no reason he could have assigned, an odd

little tremor. The dinner hour was well past. People were going to the theatres. A lady and gentleman in evening dress were coming from the entrance of the hotel. His passengers. He barely took them in from the corner of his eye without focusing on them, then bent to straighten the clock on the dashboard.

What was it made him turn his head back to look when this pair stopped, midway of the sidewalk, speaking to the starter? He saw an elderly man of portly build, yet somehow looking shrunken in his clothes, the face sagged, strained. The woman whose arm he held was magnificent. A neck-to-heels evening wrap of iridescent brocade partially covered the held-up evening gown; the well-carried dark head had a little shining jewelled band where the hair was beginning to show a glint of white, but the long, slate-grey eyes were as imperious as ever.

It had come at last. This was his father and mother.

He sat there shocked into stupidity—not wit enough left to turn his face away from the light. He let the starter come forward and open the taxi door. His mother, in front, had her foot on the step when she glanced up and encountered his eyes.

For a minute she stood rigid, choking off a cry so short in her throat that it seemed a mere exclamation.

"What is it, now, Nettie?" with the shrill querulousness of a sick man. "What is it?" Then, noting the direction of her eyes, turning, looking, he also was stricken momentarily speechless.

It seemed to Julian a long time that they, three McCullochs, stared silent, the starter looking from one to the other of them, scared by their behaviour. Then his mother drew back. Her breath sounded loud between each word as she said:

"Not—this—car."

"Why, Madam," the starter began in a flurried way, "the car is—this is one of our best—the man is——"

Julian's father broke out cursing. His face purpled; it worked and twisted strangely. He flourished his stick, crying in that shrill, thinned voice:

"Get to hell out of here!"

His mother caught the raised arm, wrispering loud:

"Stephen—Stephen!" Then, "Send him away." And after that, "Stephen, come back in the hotel. People are noticing—you'll be heard. Oh,—this is dreadful!"

She looked about her. The starter, who had been holding the door open, slammed it shut, asking blankly:

"Is the lady ill?"

Julian could see his father shake as he raged:

"Look what you've done! You've half killed your mother. Go on, can't you? Get out of here!"

"Oh, Stephen—don't speak so loud!"

Julian's machine went ahead to the tune of his mother's words. Still saving appearances. He hardly knew what he was doing till he found himself wheeled back into his post at the end of the waiting line. The next taxi to his had moved up. He couldn't see whether his mother and father were taking that or had gone back into the hotel. He was surprised to find how hard this encounter hit him. He was trembling, though more inwardly than outwardly. That thin, querulous voice of his father's—it seemed as though the foundations of life itself had given way somewhere. He looked about him at the square, the tall hotel building, the moving figures and cars, the other chauffeurs on the sidewalk near their machines. He shouldn't have stayed in San Francisco. If he had gone further away in the first place this couldn't have happened.

Sitting so he found his whole body suddenly atingle with memory of the beating his father had given him. He could feel the muscles swell in his arm as his fingers unconsciously contracted when that scene acted itself over in his mind. He had allowed it then. Probably he couldn't have put up much resistance. But he knew that he wouldn't allow such a thing now; the strength that was in him would never submit. At that he was drowned in a kind of futile, foolish pity to think how far from possible such an assault would be for the man he had seen there on the sidewalk. He couldn't get away from it, nor back to his usual composure all the rest of the evening. Taking a party out to the Cliff House; getting in to town well toward morning; leaving his machine and going up on the street car in the chill dawn to One-thirty-nine, he still felt a good deal shaken.

In the weeks that followed, Julian couldn't get rid of the sense of shock. He was thrown back so into the feelings of his childhood. To the boy of those days his father had never meant much but a kind of looming power—big, silent, well-

groomed man, going up and down the stairs; he filled his clothes then; when he spoke it was in brief words of easy mastery. The shrunken look, the flourished walking stick, the senile cursing—he burned at remembrance of them—the shame that youth and strength feels for the downfall of what was great before its eyes. Brooding, he told himself that those two people were nothing to him; they had made themselves nothing, after doing their worst to smash his chance of happiness in this world. Why should it have stayed with him so? He didn't realise how long this black mood had held till one Sunday Madeline Kaylor stopped him in the lower hall as he came in from his lunch, and asked:

"Is anything the matter, Julian?"

"No. Why?"

She hesitated, studying his face doubtfully.

"Do you know that you haven't been like yourself for a month?"

"Yes, I know it."

"Then there *is* something the matter. Is it— I haven't offended you any way, have I?"

"No." Julian forced himself to be considerate. "Please don't worry."

He would have gone on then, but he didn't like to push past her.

"Julian," she leaned toward him, confidential. "I'm just miserable about your working around the big hotels, and the swell end of town——"

He made an impatient movement.

"Well, I couldn't help knowing that sooner or later you were bound to meet some one—er—some one out of the past—and it would make you feel—just like it has."

"Well—and if I did?"

She fell back a little.

"I—Jule—I won't ask you any questions, but—was it—Lynnie?"

"Where did you get that name?"

"For God's sake don't look at me like that! I never meant to pry—to spy on you. It was when you were delirious; you'd say it over a hundred times at a stretch—'Lynnie, Lynnie, Lynnie,'—it just went through my heart——"

"Be still."

Scared, half whispering—there were voices on the upper landing—she yet went on:

"But listen. I just know she was what made the trouble. She wasn't worthy of you—she couldn't have been. And now, if you've been seeing her again—if you're going back to her—Oh, ain't it a friend's part to warn you?"

He shook her off, and started up the stairs. She faltered a step or two after him, calling guardedly:

"Wait—listen. What are you going to do?"

Mrs. Parker and Minnie Goldstein, chatting in the open doorway of the Parker room, were abruptly silent as he answered over his shoulder:

"I'm going to find other lodgings."

Inside his room, he threw off coat and vest and went to work packing. When he was done, everything in trunk and suitcases, or in a heap of throw-away stuff on the floor, it was too late for any dinner. He had to get into his chauffeur's uniform and down to Union Square, to his work. The halls were empty as he was leaving. He found Madeline, her poor tear-marked face carefully smoothed up with powder, lingering on the stairs. She walked with him to the front door, and spoke quietly:

"I'm awfully sorry you feel this way. I—I don't know what did get into me to talk to you like that. I never would again. Won't you say you forgive me?"

"Don't apologise. We'll drop it, please."

Half way down to the Hyde Street car-line, he saw the upcar stop; a man swung himself off, a stockily built fellow who looked very familiar. Would Thatch be in town without having given him notice? He went on to the corner to wait for his car. The man came up to the same sidewalk, looking about him. It was Thatch; at the first glance Julian was aware of something strange in his appearance. They shook hands gravely.

"Were you coming to see me?" Julian asked. "I'm on my way to work."

"Yes."

"Suppose you ride down on the car with me, then? I'm due at Union Square in ten minutes."

"Let's go on back to your room, Jule," Thatch spoke low without looking at him. "I've got something to tell you."

"Not time," Julian glanced at his watch. "What's the matter with your riding down to the Square?"

"I don't think you'll be working to-night," Thatch, taking hold of his arm, started him back up Union Street. Julian went without protest. But he looked sidewise at Thatch as they swung along together, suggesting:

"I can 'phone them from the house."

"They're not expecting you," Thatch said. "I went there first. Thought you'd be on to-day."

"Oh." Julian asked no more questions. They mounted the hill in silence, except that once when they halted a moment at a cross-street, Thatch looked out over the bay and said:

"Pretty view from here," and Julian answered in the same subdued tone:

"Yes, I've liked it."

And after all Thatch checked in the doorway of One-thirty-nine and spoke abruptly.

"Your father sent for me out at the house last night and asked me to come up and bring you back with me. Hold on," as Julian made a motion to speak, "he's sick."

"Seriously?"

"He ain't been well a-tall for two or three months," Thatch looked at him anxiously. "I guess your old man's had his passports handed to him this time, Jule. Don't think he's ever going to be up again."

"Why should I go to him?" the words came half unconsciously. "What is he to me? What am I to him? Did he really send you up here for me, Thatch—or did you just come yourself?" He stood looking down a moment, then it seemed he ought to make himself clear; he cared enough about Thatch for that. "If it's the money you're thinking of, there's nothing to it, Thatch," he said slowly. "I—I saw my father last September. He looked ill enough at that time. But—well, you understand, what happened then makes me wonder if he really sent for me, if he actually wants to see me."

"Uh-hunh," Thatch nodded. "That was when they were up to see the specialist. He told me about running onto you. Said, being sick and all, it gave him a sort of jump, and he bawled you out pretty rough, but he didn't think you'd hold spite."

"I don't." Julian knew now for whom the emotion and anxiety

in Thatch's face had been. Spite—hold spite against the poor soul he had seen there in front of the hotel?

"We'll have to hustle if we catch the 9:15 down. Can't stop to pack, or anything. 'Fraid you'll have to go in your uniform."

"That doesn't matter. Come in." Julian opened the street door and went ahead up the stairs. "I'm packed, as it happens; except a few things on my bureau. I was getting ready to move."

"Going to move—from One-thirty-nine?" Thatch lowered his tone suddenly. Julian heard the latch of Madeline Kaylor's door give as they passed through the lower hall.

"Leaving town," Julian shielded her from criticism.

"Oh," they had got into the third floor hall almost running. Thatch jerked the 'phone book from its hook up there. "I'll call us a taxi," he said. "Only way we can make it and get your baggage there. Good you happened to be packed. Better take everything down with you." His hand was on the receiver when they heard some one coming up the stairs. From the second floor landing Madeline called:

"Was that you, Julian? Anything the matter? What brought you back? Who's with you?"

The two in the upper hall looked at each other. Neither spoke. There came a sound of flying feet on the stairs, Madeline rushed up and almost into them before she could check herself.

"Well!" she halted and stared at the newcomer. "For goodness' sake! Where'd you drop from, Thatch Dye?"

Julian, going on swiftly into the room, heard Thatch answer:

"From San Vicente—Las Reudas."

At that Madeline evidently grabbed the receiver, for he heard an impatient:

"Give that back to me! Jule and I have got to make the 9:15. We got no time for foolishness."

"Thatch," there was sound of a scuffle, "what's this you're framing up on me?"

"On you?" Thatch rasped. "What you got to do with it? I tell you I hafto get a taxi for Julian's trunks. He's going home."

She dropped Thateh and came running into the room to Julian.

"Don't take everything away," she pleaded. "You'll be

coming back to San Francisco. And when you come back—oh, Jule, you wouldn't stay anywhere but in my house, would you?"

"He's not coming back," Thatch put in from the door. "Be still, Maddy."

"Oh, God, Thatch—you don't know what this means to me!" She wrung her hands.

Thatch stopped her with a gesture. Glancing toward him Julian thought she might have read the message in the way he stood. But she went on:

"I don't see why you come here to make trouble between him and me. He's paid me every cent he owed me—but he wasn't going to leave the house—" her eyes fell on the packed trunks and suitcases and she went on lamely, "that is—if—if—" her voice failed. She gave Julian a long look, then turned on Thatch again. "I believe you started this thing about his leaving in the first place. I'll bet it's your work—trying to get him to go home."

"His father's dying," Thatch said brusquely and brushed past her to the telephone.

That sobered her. She pulled herself together, but as Thatch went to his 'phoning she drew close to Julian and whispered:

"Ain't I ever going to see you again?" Then, with a hysteric mounting of her tone, "I can't bear it—I just can't bear it—oh!"

"Let up on that stuff, Maddy," Thatch called sharply through the open door. "You know what you look like trying to hang onto Jule—now that he's going to come into his money."

Julian glanced up from a muffler he was folding and got a sudden glimpse of Madeline's face. He turned quickly and laid an arm across her shoulders.

"You oughtn't to speak to her that way, Thatch," he said gently. "You hurt her feelings. She's been a good friend to me—when I needed one."

Madeline looked at him with her mouth open, the corners down frankly like that of a child about to cry, then wheeled and ran to Thatch, hiding her face against his shoulder, sobbing:

"Listen to him! God knows it's true. Yet who but him would say it—that way? He knows I'd be willing to slave for him and support him. He knows I wasn't after the McCulloch

money. It's only—it's only— Oh, Thatch, get me away before I make a bigger fool of myself than I have!"

Thatch shut the door on her grief and his telephoning. Julian heard the taxi ordered, then, choking, smothered tones from Maddy, and Thatch's:

"Aw, Maddy—there—there—don't cry. Maddy, you're a good girl. Say—I didn't mean to be rough with you—honest, I didn't."

CHAPTER XXIV

A MULTY-MILLIONAIRE

THEY made the eight-fifteen—just. Afterward, sitting in the Pullman smoker, which they had to themselves, Julian was conscious of Thatch's uneasy eye upon him from time to time; finally came:

"What's in that grip, Jule?"

"My overnight things."

"M-m-m. I never thought of your leaving them trunks in storage that way. Wouldn't 'a' cost a cent to check 'em on your ticket—and had 'em along. Anyhow, I do wish you had a dark suit with you."

"See here, Thatch," Julian brought his mind around to this matter with an effort. "This chauffeur's uniform doesn't cut any figure. They know all about it. I don't hold spite; but if I go to the house, I go just as I am. You say he's a very sick man. He's my father; if all he wants of me is to curse me out again . . . Well—I'll give him the chance."

"Oh, Jule, nothing like that. Nothing like that. 'S all different now. Your old man's had his passports handed him this time. Acute Bright's disease—they don't get well of that. You know how it happened—don't you?"

"No."

" 'Bout three months ago. He got a whack 'crost the kidneys, in the gymnasium. In't my place day or so after, stoopin' round; all stiffened up; said he'd tried a Turkish bath and massage for it, but they didn't reach the case. Since then he's never been well a-tall. He's went down fast. You wouldn't believe——"

"Yes, yes." Julian stirred uncomfortably. "I saw him."

Roar and sway of the train, long intervals of silence. Thatch breaking out now and then with some forgotten detail, or speaking of his own affairs, Julian answering vaguely, his thoughts turned inward. When they stopped in San Vicente, Thatch

said quietly, "I'm going on through with you"; and at Las Rendas they took the one taxi that met the midnight train.

It was weird, rolling up the drive that way in the blank, still middle of the night, finding the three big porch lights going, the place lit up, as he had seen it many times in the past for social functions. The carpet even was on the steps; he wondered at that till he realised that it was for the sake of silencing the footfalls. In spite of the illumination, the place had a curiously deserted look.

"You go on," Thatch said, "I'll wait here," and sat down on the top step.

The door stood partly open: Julian swung it further and went in. At first he thought the hall was empty; but immediately a serious, long-faced, short-legged Japanese got up from the telephone table in the alcove and came toward him, hand extended for card or message. It was not necessary for Julian to explain who he was; there was a sound of movement and lowered voices in the hall above, and a man's figure started down the stairway.

"Dr. McCurdy," that was his mother's voice, imperious, but carefully lowered. "Wait."

McCurdy halted to answer over his shoulder:

"Julian's come. He's here now."

They were shaking hands, when Julian saw that his mother had followed McCurdy down and was coming behind him. Their glances met; nothing but hostility in her eyes.

"I see," she said coldly, then as McCurdy stepped aside and she caught sight of his olive drab and puttees, she stiffened and her face flamed crimson.

"You'd better go right on up, Julian," said McCurdy, covering the awkward moment.

"He can't—dressed like that!" There was a contained violence in her tones. "I won't have——"

Without a word Julian wheeled to go. But McCurdy caught him up at the door, seized his arm, and swung him back to face his mother.

"Hold on! We've got no time for foolishness."

"You don't understand, Dr. McCurdy. Julian, I wonder at you—those clothes—a deliberate taunt—your poor father——"

"Clothes?" McCurdy snorted. "For God's sake, Mrs. Mc-

Culloch, this is no time to—Julian get yourself upstairs, quick. Your father's asking for you, every breath."

Julian stood, making no move to go up, looking at his mother, while McCurdy went over to the stand, and struck the bell on it. His summons brought a nurse running with muted step. She stopped at the stair-head, crying softly:

"Has Mr. McCulloch's son come? We heard the auto and thought—" Then, catching sight of Julian in his chauffeur's dress, "Do go and tell young Mr. McCulloch to come up, please —at once—Oh—at once."

Julian's mother kept with him up the stair; they left McCurdy looking after them in the hall. At the stair-head he checked and faced her.

"Well?"

"Oh—go on. I suppose it doesn't matter now. Nothing matters now." He had never heard that poignant tone from her. The nurse had hurried on down the corridor ahead of them. At the door he drew back for his mother to precede him. She went over to the bed and bent there between him and the sick man. Julian couldn't hear what she said, but he got the querulous answer:

"Never mind that now, Nettie—never mind. Did he come? Is he here?"

She moved aside, and Julian saw his father's face turned expectantly. And all at once he felt somehow guilty, to be twenty-two, with health and vitality tingling through his veins; for the countenance there on the pillow was that of a dead man; only the eyes lived. He went forward quickly, in answer to their urgency, and laid a hand over the wandering fingers on the coverlet.

"Heh—Jule—you did get here—in time. Find him a chair—somebody."

The nurse brought a chair. Julian sitting, leaned forward toward the bed. His mother continued to stand. She nodded a dismissal to the nurse, and the woman, after stopping a moment at the bed's foot to smooth the covers and look anxiously at her patient, left the room. The three were alone. To Julian life suddenly narrowed down to himself and his father, with the Great Mystery hanging fog-like over this point of time and space where they might speak together—and there she stood, looking from one to the other, bitter-eyed, watching. The man

on the bed lay silent. That gaze that pierced Julian's heart would come up, encounter his own as though to beg something, then drop to the coverlet. Again and again he seemed about to begin; it was agonising to hear his breath flutter as he made the effort. When he did finally speak it was only to say:

"That did leave a scar. Oh, well——"

A look of helpless indignation from his mother. Julian's hand went to the scarred cheek. He tried to think of something that wouldn't be too banal to express his lack of resentment against his father for what was past. It was as though the dying man heard his thought, and answered it:

"I know; I know you've not been grouching at me all this time. I understand."

"Stephen! Don't apologise to him! He's the one to humble himself—to you—to me—to—oh, what am I saying?" She bit her lip, and was silent. His father put out a trembling hand toward her, but he looked at Julian.

"Never mind, Nettie, who apologises," the flicker of a grey smile on his face. "Queer how things look to people well, up on their feet . . . different, down in bed like this . . . walking papers in the pocket of your pajamas."

"Oh," his mother groaned, "dearest—don't!"

"Poor Nettie," he answered her cry. "But you've got to face it." He spoke to Julian now as though she were not there. "I tried Christian Science. Those people have got something, Jule. They've got something—but we've given it up." He broke off and sighed.

"Stephen, dear—I'm perfectly willing that anything on earth should be tried. I have been for—for weeks, now."

"I'm not blaming you, Nettie." He lay silent and presently added, "I guess there's something in me, too, that didn't want to hold on to Science. I'd get so I couldn't fix my mind on the texts. I'd fall right back where I was—even before anybody said a word to me."

"If—if you'd be willing to see him—I'd go down this minute and call up the practitioner."

"Too late. I've given it up. Definitely." He rolled his head on the pillow. "Let McCurdy give me something to relieve the pain when it gets too bad. I can't try any more."

The hand that had reached toward his wife was withdrawn and moved restlessly on the bed-covers.

"How did we get to talking about this?" he asked. "It isn't what I wanted to say to you, Julian. Last—September . . . your mother'd had some talk brought to her about a shooting scrape with Consadine in a dance-hall." His gaze rested on Julian for a moment. "Then that night—at the St. Francis—we saw you driving a taxi. I was a sick man then, Jule. This thing had me . . . broke my back. What was I saying? So I had to send for Thatcher Dye, and let him go get you."

"I'd have come for a letter—a telegram—anything," Julian heard his own voice, husky with feeling, as he spoke.

"Oh, Stephen, darling," his mother pleaded, "an hour ago you worried for fear he wouldn't come! I knew he'd jump at the chance."

Julian said nothing; his father answered for him:

"That isn't what he means, Nettie. The boy doesn't think he's come back—in the sense you're talking of. Rather starve in the street—heh, Jule?"

"I shouldn't starve now, sir," Julian said.

"M-hum," his father's eyes were on the olive-drab. "Making good wages, heh? Well . . . you'll never run any car again, Jule . . . but your own . . . Day or two . . . you'll be a—very—rich man."

A moment's silence, then:

"I'm leaving you the Alaska properties." An upward glance. "Your mother knows. She doesn't object. She and I had divided the property years ago. She gets the factory. She'll have plenty. I'm leaving you the Alaska properties, and all my personal belongings here. My ear—your mother wouldn't care for the kind of machine I've got—but you'll like it. It's a——"

"Oh, dearest, how can you speak of money—and cars—things like that—now!"

The cry seemed to break down what little composure the sick man had.

"Antoinette," he gasped. "Go! Go out of the room."

"And Julian?"

"Leave him here. I've got to speak to Jule."

"What could your father have to say to you—that he wouldn't

want me to hear?" Julian's mother accused him. Before he could make any response:

"Oh, go—go—go!" the spent tones rose so that the nurse looked in, alarmed. "Don't quarrel with him here, Nettie. Wait till I'm dead."

"Quarrelling? I'm not quarrelling. I can't bear to see you waste your precious strength on— Is it strange that I should want you to talk to me—to look at me—for this—little time we have?"

She went then, eyeing Julian bitterly to the last. The door closed behind her. His father motioned toward it, whispering:

"See if it's shut tight. My papers," the tone was stronger, more composed. As Julian turned back to the bed he saw his father fumbling under the pillow, to bring out a little memorandum, and offer it, with:

"Take that and see if you can read it."

It was a list of places where his private papers might be looked for. The writing was shaky, but plain enough.

"I can read it," Julian said.

"Y' see what it covers—stuff in the house here; third floor; library; old desk over't the factory; m' office at the bank."

He lay still a moment, looking at the ceiling.

"I wouldn't have your mother go through my papers—with a lawyer—as she would, of course— Jule, I couldn't die till I'd had your word that you'd take charge of 'em all. Burn things that ought to be burned. Go through 'em. Close 'em up. I can trust you. I don't mind your seeing anything you'll see."

His voice ceased, and there was a long silence before Julian said slowly:

"I'll do anything I can for you, sir. But—shall I be allowed? You saw—to-night."

"Yes. I've fixed it. You're my executor—with Hardwick—my lawyer. What's the matter? Don't you want to do it?"

"Oh, yes—I'll do it, sir," Julian hurried to agree.

"All right. All right." The sick man was impatient of affairs not his own—his were so pressing, the time for them so short. "You'll stay here, then, and see it through? My desk in the library—everything under lock and key, of course . . . God knows what I've got in it. Brought the stuff right into the house here with her. How was I to know—all those years—

living under one roof but separated—practically a bachelor—that she followed every move I made—jealous—sore? In the last year and a half—since—you know—since your mother and I have been together—there hasn't been anything that wouldn't bear inspection. Clear up everything that belongs to me—and in all those other places—letters; some photographs, I guess; memoranda—old stuff—all old stuff. Yet since I've been so sick . . . couldn't remember what I had down in black and white . . . always been the damndest fool about getting things down in black and white—keeping 'em sticking around . . . Run things as though I expected to live forever. 'S way a healthy man always does, I guess. Anyhow—to be knocked out—right in the middle of things—like this. . . . Didn't want to be put out of the game—yet. Why, damn it," with a sudden flare that was almost like strength, "I'm not fifty—and I've made a million. . . ."

There was nothing Julian could say; and presently his father began on a different note.

"That matter of yours—those people went east, to Lynn, Massachusetts. It may be that you'll find something about it in my accounts or receipts. I had several letters from the mother at first—before I lost track of them."

Julian's hand which held the papers shook. The sick man noticed it.

"I don't think you can blame yourself in that affair, Jule . . . A kid . . . Your mother had made a hell of a mess of bringing you up. As far as the girl was concerned——"

"I should have married her."

"You couldn't. Boy of that age— We had you."

"Because I let you. It was all up to me. I should have married her—somehow—anyhow—whatever happened."

"Well . . . she wanted the money. I was liberal with them. There was no open disgrace. She—" he lifted a sudden gaze to Julian's face— "She was a pretty little thing. Married by this time, to that fellow in—somewhere there—I forget the name—that place they moved to—and the better off for what happened to her. Looked at in one way . . . you gave her a chance she never would have got otherwise."

"Married by this time!" When Julian would have asked further his lips were dry—his throat shut down on the words.

"Hurts you—yet—to talk about it," the sick man said gently. "I didn't know you cared as much as that." He rolled his head a little on the pillow; the burning eyes searched Julian's face, then glanced wearily away. "I guess you'll just have to forgive me. I didn't know."

When the lids dropped over those eyes, Julian couldn't be sure whether he slept or was unconscious, or only weak. But he had to ask:

"Did you—did you have any reason to think—Lynnie—married?"

"Married?" The eyes opened and looked wonderingly all about the room. "Oh, the little Willis girl. Yes . . . last letter I had from her mother. . . . She'd have been married months by this time."

Afterward it seemed to Julian that if he was to get this blow it might well have fallen when and where it did. He sat there, mechanically folding and straightening the papers his father had given him, finally putting them in the breast pocket of his coat. The sick man seemed asleep. He rose and stood uncertainly by the bedside, then tiptoed toward the door. There his father's voice stopped him.

"Going, Jule?"

"Yes, Father."

"You'll be right here in the house. Take my old rooms—the third floor. Thank you for coming. I'll see you in the morning. I believe I can sleep. Good-night."

"Lynnie was married—had been married for months." With this one fact benumbing him for the moment to everything else, Julian closed his father's door behind him, and looked along the lighted hall. Up there near his mother's room two women stood talking in murmurs. When they saw him one of them, the nurse, came hurrying silent-footed past him and went in to her patient. The other, a younger, slenderer figure, hesitated forward in seeming embarrassment, so that they met at the stair-head, and Paula Pollard, looking, save for conventional town wear and lack of sunburn, as though she might have stepped out of the old machine at the gate of "Restlands," said haltingly, after a queer half-furtive glance at his uniform:

"Oh—er—how do you do, Julian?"

They went downstairs together. She stopped at the hall table,

and began turning over the letters that lay on it. Julian had already forgotten her, when she spoke without looking around:

"I'll go through these now; I attend to your mother's mail. We live just next door, you know." She seemed to be declining by implication his unoffered escort home.

Julian passed out to the lighted porch. Thatch Dye, sitting on its steps, his head dropped almost to his knees, roused and got up, blinking:

"How is he?" the futile query always put at such a time; Julian answered:

"No worse. Seemed better when I left him. Sorry I forgot you, Thatch."

"Oh, never mind me. You're going to stay?"

"Yes."

"Well, thank God for that. Wired for them trunks yet? No? Don't bother about it, then; I'll 'tend to it for you." Thatch stood a moment emitting little sounds of sympathy, yet of satisfaction. "Last year and a half," he muttered, "I've got to like your old man fine. His being hustled out this way gets to me. But if he had to go—it's good he's doing the straight thing by you. I'm as glad for his sake as for yours. Do you know what he's leaving you, Jule?" wistfully.

The little rustling of papers in the hall behind them was stilled.

"The Alaska properties."

Thatch whistled.

"Jule McCulloch!" he exclaimed. "It'll make you a multy-millionaire. You know what the war's done to copper. A multy-millionaire. Say—it'll do me good to see you have what you ought." He came back to call from the foot of the steps, "Say, Jule?"

"Yes."

"You know who's going to be tickled about this? Dad. He's been terrible hurt over the way things have went the last two years. I'll sure enjoy telling him. Good-night."

Julian stood and watched the departure of that stocky, self-reliant figure as he had watched it that day in San Francisco, when he had envied Thatch. He turned and looked into the lofty, lighted hall, toward the broad steps that led up to the music-room;

and his thoughts travelled along that narrower way which opened down to the library and side entrance. He shivered a little.

"Julian, a minute, please." Paula was talking to the Jap in there. "I'm having the boy take your bag up to your room—is that right? Your own room."

"To my—oh, no. Pardon me, Paula." Then to the boy, "Carry that up to the third floor."

"I—I didn't mean to be officious, Julian. You see, I've got so in the habit of attending to small things here, that I——"

The moment Julian's glance came round so that she met it, she put a hand out, breaking off with:

"I couldn't help hearing Thatcher Dye. I—I can't tell you how glad I am that it's all made up again between you and your parents. It's been——"

He had to take her hand. He was aware of her going on with a good deal of that sort of talk. He even realised dimly, at the last, that what she wanted now was for him to walk with her over to her door. Rather crude and hasty—even for Paula. Possibly she realised something of this herself, for she left in something of a flurry.

When she had finally got herself away, when he heard on the night's stillness the little gate in the hedge between the two places clang behind her, he went slowly up to the main landing, and paused there, staring down into the side entry. Again wind and rain outside, flying leaves against the windows; groaning branches; his father and Charley Willis wrangling down there; a scared boy, his mother fluttering at his elbow, going step by step, as he now began to descend—ghosts in every corner. Past the library door; on to the side porch. There was the garage where he had waited for her—there the way up which they had come, herding her. . . . The sequence was inevitable . . . the curving driveway, through the back gate, on to the hollow.

In the old days the hollow had been so dark; what was the light back here, behind the trees? Oh, the new boulevard Thatch had told him of, to the Country Club, St. Vincent's Pass, and the hills beyond. He stepped out on its wide concrete floor, which stretched away toward the viaduct and San Vicente, empty as a ballroom at dawn. It passed across the hollow at a high level; on each side of its bright belt, jewelled with grouped lights, gulfs of blackness fell away. Down there the old neigh-

bourhood lay, deserted, "junked," as Thatch had said—thrown to the scrap-heap. No street crossings here to show him where he was. Peering out into the darkness, he got a straggling tree-top and the peak of a roof—Daggett's Grocery—the roadbed on a level with its second story window. On then, till the electrolier announced another corner. In the stronger illumination he saw the Willis place. There it crouched, a poor cast-off shell, in the midst of its dried, dusty shrubs and perishing trees, its window sashes mere tattered fringes of glass around empty sockets; not so much like dead eyes as the sightless hollows in a skull.

The past—all that had been between him and Lynnie—they had shovelled it in there; it lay uncovered in that open grave. She was in Lynn, Massachusetts—married. And he stood here to look at the place where he had failed her so—"a multy-millionaire."

CHAPTER XXV

MARKING TIME

THE time that followed his father's death—with the funeral, for which certain people were rushing to Las Rendas from the ends of the earth; full of the futile pomp, the solemn publicity which belonged to the passing of a rich man—was a time confused, to Julian's mind, by something obscure, something concealed, that moved beneath its obvious surface. For, after all, Stephen McCulloch died suddenly, and this curious perplexity began for Julian the night of his death.

That first interview relieved the sick man's mind; he rallied; he seemed so much better that it was believed he might even be up again. Julian had begun to consider leaving the house, though remaining in Las Rendas. His little daily visit with his father could be managed as well from a hotel; he would be within easy reach if needed; and he and his mother rasped each other at every contact. Surely his presence here was no comfort to her; it seemed to him that they never by any chance agreed on any least minor point. She was jealous of every moment of his dying father's time; he pitied her grief; why should he stay to offend it?

Then, before a week was out, he was waked in the small hours by the nervous hammering on his door of the usually calm, impassive night nurse.

"Mr. Julian!" she called. "Your father—it's come—he's dying!" And as he pushed past her, dragging on his bathrobe, she added, "Oh, I ought to have called you at the first! Hurry do hurry."

He should have been called at the first! He ran downstairs; but as he got almost to his father's door it flew open and Cass Hardwick came bolting out, McCurdy at his shoulder, snapping angrily:

"Don't talk to me. It's indefensible. *No* business was im-

portant enough. You and the madam ought to have known better. You've finished him—you've been the death of him."

Julian stopped short. There was an apologetic mutter from Hardwick that sounded like "sent for you——"

"Yes," McCurdy cut him off, "when my patient was in a state of collapse from your infernal business interviews! And my own nurse let you by—to him—without notifying me."

Here was the explanation of her battering on his door like that, of her standing now, white-faced, almost crying. McCurdy glanced around, saw Julian, and gestured him in with a jerk of the thumb, and:

"Go in, Jule. I don't mean you. It was you he wanted."

Strange inside the room, too; his mother there, still confident, believing his father had only fainted, sharply demanding of the nurses why McCurdy didn't come and do something for him; at sight of Julian hastily catching up from bed and floor what seemed to be several telegrams, crumpling them, stuffing them into the sleeve of her robe. That first impression was brief; afterward it all whirled together in Julian's mind with her breaking down into the natural grief of the moment, when McCurdy at last came in and told her bluntly he could do no more, and the pain of standing there forced to witness an abandon of feeling which he had not thought her capable of and could do nothing to alleviate. His father never regained consciousness; and a little later, when it was all over, she allowed him to help her to her room, clinging to him, moaning.

Death had come; and for all the weeks of dread and preparation it arrived at last as a blow. For the moment his mother was benumbed by it. He left her in the nurse's hands, and went up to his own rooms. He dressed and breakfasted there; it was nearly nine o'clock when he came down and found Hardwick waiting. His father's room was in the hands of the undertaker's men, and the lawyer had asked for Julian.

A moment the two of them stood at the stair-head, looking. The place was beginning to fill with rustling, low-voiced groups who sat in the parlours and talked in respectful undertones, or moved discreetly with the faint whisper of silken draperies. Already had begun the solemn mummery. The faces down there looked strangely blank and hypocritical; no tone that came to him had any ring of naturalness in it.

"I suppose you know that you and I are executors under the will," the lawyer was brief. He stared at Julian, then suddenly broke out with a whispered:

"By heck! It *was* you I saw there on 'The Coast,' playing the piano in a dancehall."

"Yes, it was I."

"Huh! Well, Steve didn't believe me when I told him—or pretended not to. Maybe he knew more than I did about it—what?"

"Probably."

The big, brilliant eyes looked Julian over from head to foot.

"Well, I'm ready to go with you now and seal the receptacles of private papers."

Perfectly straightforward; exactly what his father had prepared him for; and yet, as they went through the prescribed forms, first in the house here—the third floor and the library—then in the car to the factory and the bank, neither of them speaking much, Julian found himself watching the man beside him, wondering what those messages could have been which he would bring to his dying client in the middle of the night, and which Julian's mother would hide in her sleeve.

In the time that followed, some form of this question asked itself continually in Julian's mind, while through the house flowed a tide of those who cater to the grief of high society as though it were any other social function, while bushels of flowers wilted in all the rooms; new servants hurried about with new and special duties. Often he was sent for to his mother's room. She seemed eager to see him—he wondered why—examining him when he came in, swiftly, half-furtively, asking him a multitude of little, trivial questions—what was he doing? Where had he been, whom seen? awaiting the dutiful, indifferent answers with such burning interest.

When the day of the funeral arrived, the wide, tree-lined avenue poured out its near-at-hand people, who came walking slowly, speaking in subdued tones; the big, silent-moving cars swung up to the place in droves, and rounded the gravelled loop, bringing his mother's world of society people from further away in Las Reudas and San Vicente. She had no relatives nearer than Veriginia; but continually amid this flow of fashion and elegance, a strange reef of his father's connections would be

glimpsed—persons who never had been in this house before—acquaintances the dead man could now neither acknowledge nor disown; old friends that some member of the household must see; business associates; dependents; those who had been telegraphed for; those who stood to lose by his father's death—some, who, he imagined, stood to gain from it. The inventor of the high explosive, a pathetic man with the eyes of a lost child; a few scattered employees of the closed-down factory; representatives of exclusive clubs and societies; the bank employees in a body. For the first time in his life he saw and shook hands with his cousin, Homer McCulloch, who arrived with his wife from their Petaluma chicken ranch, and remembered hearing his mother thank fate, years ago, that no more McCulloch relatives had come out from the Middle West.

How little of all this actually belonged to and made part of Julian's own life! Calkins, home from Belgium; Uncle Ben, up from the ranch for the funeral; Benchy Prentiss, bringing his mother; Zoe and her grandparents; Paula, who had been all over the house in the week past, running his mother's errands, the only channel of communication with that closed room where nobody was received but milliners and dressmakers—and Cass Hardwick; Paula, on her father's arm that day. And even these only emerged into reality or interest to him as they had been connected in any way with that summer in Siloam.

The date of the will was a surprise to Julian; it had been drawn quite shortly after the separation between his father and mother fifteen years ago, with only codicils and additions to bring it down to the present time. His inheritance had been secure to him all these years! Uncle Ben was out the day after it was read. They sat in the little writing room.

"Just came to tell you good-bye before I go back to the valley. Two years since I put eyes on you, boy. Lot of water gone under the bridge since then. . . . An' you show for it." The old eyes looked him over lingeringly. "Well—you got your chance to go to Alaska; and you'll go, right—now. You've got your chance—but I don't reckon they's a chance like that for me."

"Why—yes, there is, if you want it, Uncle Ben. I shouldn't like to interfere with any of my mother's arrangements, but——"

"Shucks!" eagerly. "Nettie wouldn't care. Any good Portugee could hold down that job of mine——"

"Well, then, we'll see," said Julian, as they shook hands for good-bye.

The sorting of those private papers was not to be arrived at peaceably. When his mother assumed that of course she would be present while the work was done, the lawyer shuffled, evaded, and would plainly have permitted her. It was left to Julian to defend their instructions.

"Wow! That was a near thing." Hardwick jerked out a handkerchief and mopped his brow, as they went up to the third floor, leaving her standing tall and angry at the foot of the stairs. "Steve knew what he was about when he put you on with me for the private papers. He knew darned well I'd weaken where it came to your mother—anything that wore petticoats would have me rolling over and playing dead—sitting up and begging."

A few minutes later he looked across the small desk whose pigeon-holes they were emptying to say:

"Steve had you to fall back on, didn't he? Had a son. Huh—I've always said Marriage was hell; but after all, when it came to the end—Steve had a son. And I'll have nobody. Miracle to me, the way you handled the situation down there."

Most of the letters from men began "Dear Steve," or "Dear Mac," hasty notes—occasionally a telegram—making appointments, fishing, hunting, to see ring or track events. Very many concerned business favors, assistance, borrowed money; often these were from intimates of his father's beginning days, who hadn't gone up the ladder as he had. And Stephen McCulloch had answered generously, lavishly; he had been a free-hearted friend and associate. He had grub-staked them, backed their failing enterprises, given them a hand through tight places—and not been too choice as to what the difficulty was. A little bunch labelled "From Buster," dated at the penitentiary, San Quentin, and carried initials only. Throughout these there were allusions to a common boyhood in a small Middle West town; the last letter was one of thanks for a stake, a new start in life as the writer was going out at the close of his term.

During all those years when he was trailed around at his mother's heels, resisting fitfully and unsuccessfully her plans of

life for him, how thankful Julian would have been for even a little chance at such a friend as this! And he was the only one, it seemed, who couldn't possibly have it; his mother's main concern in those days was to see that he was kept away from it.

They turned out correspondence, memoranda, some photographs, scribbled stuff on theatre programmes or café menus, some seemingly trivial matters that had been kept for years. "Old stuff—old stuff," his father had called it, and so it was; but among it plenty to have made his mother furious with jealousy, even now. Handful after handful Julian burned it on the open hearth—the last traces of any life his father had had separate from his mother's.

When these were all destroyed, and Hardwick had pocketed the few things they had come upon that concerned business or the estate, they started down for the library. As Julian opened the door he heard the lawyer draw a quick breath, and his mother got up from the top step where she had been waiting for them.

She darted a glance at their faces, then went past Julian and said something in a low tone to the other man.

"Excuse me, Julian," she spoke over her shoulder. "I want a few words with Mr. Hardwick. Go on, please."

He left them whispering urgently; nearly fifteen minutes later Hardwick joined him in the library without comment, and they took up the work again. In the desk here they came upon the rough draft of an agreement between Charles Willis and his wife and Stephen McCulloch. Hardwick's civil, averted air, the very motion of his fingers and thumbs as he passed the document over, said that he knew all there was to know about it. Julian sat there, in his hands the contract by which he and Lynnie, and their love, had been sold, barely aware of Hardwick going on shuffling and sorting, in this dim room through whose drawn curtains as he stared at the writing, vivid noon sunshine seemed to pierce in little stabs, lighting up one face, then another and another. Cruel faces: Charley Willis's twisted in weak suffering, trying hard for dignity; his wife's frankly eager, eyeing Lynnie as though she were a thing they had for sale; Lynnie's own little face, withered-looking, wrung. Oh, they two had been auctioned that morning to the highest bidder. And even so, his father hadn't really meant ill; "You'll have to forgive me," he had said of it, there at the last.

And though he had bought the Willises off, he must have followed them with a measure of kindness, he must have figured to them as a sort of Providence; for there under the agreement lay a dim picture postcard—the silk mills at Lynn, Massachusetts —addressed in a cramped feminine hand to Mr. Stephen McCulloch, Care Third National Bank, San Vicente, Cal., carrying a date about two weeks after that scene in this room, and the message, "Arrived safely," and signed with the initials, "E. W." What was Mrs. Willis's name? Eunice. Oh, yes. Hardwick pushed over a three-year-old note of his own about a projected bear hunt in the high Sierras, sighing:

"Ey-ah, Steve! Left quite some vacant spot in my playthings when you went on."

Silence and the rustling of papers, then abruptly, "I've wanted to say to you, McCulloch, that if I really did any harm —as McCurdy said—the night your father died, I'd be sorrier than I could tell you. No use trying to get across with anything like this to McCurdy that night; doctor's in honour bound to string your life out—half conscious, or suffering, or however. But that wouldn't have been Steve. The Irish blessing for his: 'May you live happy and die quick.' "

They finished at the house that day; then came the factory and the bank. It was in the little luxurious office at the latter place that Hardwick made some observations about Zoe Consadine. They had met her coming out of the bank as they went in, stuffing bills and coin into the pockets of her riding jacket. She flipped a jaunty greeting to Hardwick, then found Julian with a child's sudden sobering in speaking for the first time with one whom death has recently touched.

"How do you do, Julian?" offering her hand. "I—I'm so sorry, you know."

As they broke the seal on the desk now, the lawyer grinned a bit sheepishly and ejaculated:

"Little devil! Be after you next, I suppose. Spares neither the cradle nor the grave."

Julian knew that Hardwick had been one of the lawyers in Zoe's divorce suit. And she'd thought it worth while to give that tough old bachelor "a whirl," as she would have phrased it.

"Little devil," Hardwick repeated a bit later. "Romped back to her home town with an interlocutory decree and both pretty

fists full of money—all fixed to raise Cain—going after everything in sight. Don't care what families she breaks up. Got a preacher on the string; brother-in-law of your man Calkins. Poor fish doesn't know whether he's on his head or his heels; and they say his wife's going to leave him. Bet you two bits she braced him about her soul. Strikes me for legal advice. Watch out what she springs on you—you can gamble on it she'll find a way to get to you."

The next day, with a safe deposit box yet to be gone through, and half a dozen other matters waiting for discussion and closing up, Julian was met at the place of appointment by a messenger with a note: Hardwick had been called to San Francisco; he hoped not to be detained long. That was all. As he read, Julian realised that the telephone had purposely not been used, so as to escape argument or reply. Hardwick gave no San Francisco address, and day followed day without any word from him.

This inactive time of waiting was hard to endure. Julian wanted to be off; and he felt himself a sliver stuck in the life of his mother's household. Up stairs and down, the halls and rooms in which had walked that child—that boy—Julian McCulloch; his possessions in some of them untouched from those old days; the hollow behind the house with its open grave; he was sick to turn his back on it all. He had already begun his arrangements for the Alaska trip. His mind was not yet made up whether to stay with the proposition up there, or come back after a time and find a place in the Aviation, or the American Ambulance corps abroad. He knew he was not essentially a fighter as Benchy Prentiss was; yet the stir and disorder of war attracted him as the stir and disorder of Big Murphy's dance-hall had attracted. When he'd closed up here, and seen his Alaska holdings, he'd be ready to come to some decision.

He met Zen Daggett on the street one day looking very out-at-elbows. After they had passed each other, Zen turned back, overtook and stopped him with a floundering:

"W'y, Ju—Mr. McCulloch; I—uh——"

He stuck there so that Julian thought of course he was trying for the right words to make a touch. His own hand was at his pocket, but when Zen did get the words, it was to say:

"D'jye hear about Rosy?—Oh, 'course not."

"No," said Julian. "What is it?"

"W'y, the vice crusade's been driving them something fierce in Frisco—raided places that never was raided before. Threw an awful scare into the girls at Murph's. And when the bulls bust in to the rooming house where Rosy staid at she tried to get out by the fire-escape, and like to killed herself. Course they took her to the City Hospital—she's goin' to live—but I guess she's gettin' a pretty raw deal right now."

Julian looked at the crude, anxious face, and remembered that the Daggetts had always stuck together.

"I hadn't a bean—above my fare," Zen was saying. "And what good would I be to the kid up there dead broke? Thank *you,*" as Julian passed over a bill. "I sure do appreciate this. And the kid'll get every cent of it, quick as I can take it to her."

It was the next day, in at Thatch's, getting some air in a tire, that a voice hailed him from the office:

"Hey! I see they got your old boss in jail," and Thatch came out grinning.

"Fertig?"

"Guessed it first time."

"Stole one car too many?"

"Worse'n that. Seems Mr. P. Fertig's been carrying these German consuls and their hired men on their private errands. Take 'em out in them dirty little flivvers—take an incendiary bomb along when it was needed to burn crops or start forest fires—haul explosives for blowing up bridges and tunnels. What the Secret Service boys got him on was having the stuff ready to stow in the coal bunkers of an outgoing ship. Oh, he's been the busy little worker."

Later the thought came to Julian of the Go-devil shanghaied into this traitor service. If that were true, it should be the first and last thing of his to serve the enemy. He began to be stirred and wakened as to what the part of an honest man, an American, was in the world just now. If Hardwick would ever get himself back and wind up things so that he could be free, he'd get to Alaska by the first boat that sailed. And once there, he'd make sure that no copper was smuggled from his smelter for enemy uses, if he had to put a cordon of his own hired police and detectives around every foot of his possessions.

Up to the top of his mind there suddenly floated the recollection of Madeline Kaylor facing Fertig out, calling him a dirty crook, rescuing the price of the little car. Now, with time to kill, he ought to do something for her and her bunch at One-thirty-nine Branch. Of course he ought; what's this Thatch had called him that night he came home? "A multy-millionaire." That's what Madeline was calling him. He had a quick, half-laughable vision of her in her sitting-room, the Sunday papers three deep on the floor about her, reading the fulsome reports of his father's funeral and his own accession to Fortune. Poor old Maddy—he'd been a bit shabby. He must straighten it up. He bought a monster box of chocolates, put a packet of new gold coins in it, and sent the parcel to her, in memory of an evening when the treat had been on him and he had failed to respond.

Calkins was out to bid him good-bye, before going to the relief work in Belgium.

"I found Paula Pollard with your mother," he said as he and Julian sat talking in the third floor rooms.

"She practically lives here," Julian nodded. "My mother depends on her a great deal."

Calkins looked at him a bit curiously.

"Yes. Both interested in the Las Reudas League For Peace. Well—" he sighed—"such people don't understand. They don't know. I went as far as I dared with your mother about the conversion of her factory into a munitions plant." He waited expectantly for Julian.

"I'd say anything I could; but it would do more harm than good. You know how that is——"

"Yes, yes," Calkins agreed. "And yet," he qualified reluctantly, "I had the feeling that your mother might make concessions if she thought they would keep you near her."

"You did? Well, that would surprise me," said Julian. Then after a pause, "Even if you're right, I'm afraid I couldn't help the cause there. But Bench Prentiss wants into that enterprise very badly; I hope Paula's not too much of a pacifist to help him along. I told him that she had a lot more influence with my mother than I ever had. When I'm done here I'll go to Alaska, of course. My own idea is that I'll either stay there or be over somewhere in your vicinity."

"Good enough," said Calkins as he shook hands. "Hope great things for you—whichever way. Well—I'll be going." But instead he got up and moved from one window to the other, looking out vaguely. "Seems a bit hard—" his speech halted with that halting step of his—"to leave poor Constance and her small youngsters—just now——" Julian realised with a touch of surprise on what subject his old tutor was speaking to him so simply. "Of course my sister comes first; but I'm sorry for Harold too—he's like a lunatic. Two years of looking on at what I've seen—over there—shrinks the personal equation. To me the really tragic figure is that poor child who's made the mischief; little Zoe Haslett—Zoe Consadine. There in Siloam —seems a century ago—she was just a frank, jolly little beggar, wanting to have a good time and help others to have one. Now she's brought a strange look in her eyes out of that marriage and that shameful divorce suit. Scorched in the fires of sex, she's trying to burn her world down in revenge."

Three or four restless days after that Julian learned late one afternoon that a special called meeting of the Las Reudas League For Peace was to be held in the McCulloch parlours that evening. The association was coming to his mother, since in her deep mourning she couldn't go to it. He quietly started in the new speedster for San Vicente, intending to dine there and return late enough to duck the whole matter. As he passed the Country Club there was Zoe herself, dressed as she generally was during daylight hours in riding breeches and short coat, and with the usual group of detrimentals about her, the usual snarl of dogs at her heels. She instantly hailed, then left her crowd and ran across to the curb to stop him. As he drew up she called back over her shoulder:

"Barney, have my horse and the dogs sent in to the house; Mr. McCulloch's driving me home." She swung herself in, asking nonchalantly, "Going somewhere special for dinner, Jule?"

"No."

"Wish you'd come and eat at my house, then. It'll be a pious act. I'm darned lonesome."

There was nobody at the Haslett home save one surprised maid who opened the door to them. In the hall Zoe said:

"You're a good old scout, Jule, to come like this. Hortense'll rustle us something to eat. We'll have it in my den.

I'm not going to change these duds. Hate the big table in the dining-room—makes me think of eating in the public square."

All through the cosy little meal in her den, Zoe kept grumbling:

"Darn these small towns and their small-town ideas! Lot of boneheads—bore you stiff. Only fun you can get out of 'em is to shock 'em—rattle their back teeth. My old crowd's about done with me. What did Calkins have to say? That man's a dead mystery."

"Nothing."

"Lie like a gentleman, don't you? Didn't have any complaints to make about his poor zob of a sister, and her preacher husband? Didn't give me away on his own account?"

"On his own account!" Julian leaned forward and stared. She'd had a try for old Calk, too—and come off loser! At his broad grin she looked half injured, muttering:

"Ungrateful brute! And I brought you here this evening to do you good and help you out."

When the tray had been taken away, she suddenly looked at him with her head on one side and demanded:

"What are you thinking about when you scowl like that?"

"Nothing in particular."

"Yes, you are, too. I know. You've been warned against me."

"I have not."

"Don't believe it. Trade slams with you. I've been put on notice about you, all right."

"By whom?"

"Oh—nice ladies."

"Nice ladies," Julian echoed.

"You'd call your mother that, wouldn't you—and—Pol Pollard? For cat's sake, don't look so innocent."

She waited a moment, but Julian only said:

"You've got the floor, Zoe."

"Well," she fumbled on the mantel and got herself a match; standing after that, a little breeched and booted figure, the cigarette drooping from the corner of her mouth or held between her fingers as she spoke, "well, it's this way: I'm the town scandal—I guess you know that. Your mother's been hardly speaking to me—for—aw, ever since I got my decree. But the

other day Pol Pollard came around here and asked me to go and call—said Mrs. McCulloch needed cheerful young society. I'm young, you know, if I ain't so cheerful. So I went. Pol was on hand, of course; but she got out of the way pretty soon, and your mother began to talk to me about you. Yep. I suppose Hardwick's told her of that shooting down on the Barbary Coast that I asked you about when I was getting my divorce. So she seemed to lump me right in with your lurid past. Oh, she warned me off good and plenty. I'm not quite a fool; she didn't need to lay it on so thick."

Julian sat and looked at her with raised brows.

"That all?"

"No; I'm not fairly started yet. See here, Jule; before I got out of that room your mother as good as told me that you and Pol Pollard were going to be married. Don't believe me? I tell you she did. It made me hot. When I came downstairs I tackled Pol herself—asked her what all the excitement was about—what the big idea was, shutting me out with a lot of teachers and preachers and insects like that, while the only worthwhile thing anywhere about was handed to her on a silver platter. I asked her flat if what your mother said was true—and she said it was."

"Well?"

"Aw, Jule—have a heart! Don't sit there and say 'Ugh,' and 'How,' like a red Indian. Is there any truth in their talk? Come across."

"Not a word of truth in it."

"Any danger of such a thing?"

"None whatever. So far as I know Paula's engaged to Bench Prentiss."

"You mean Benchy's engaged to her. Don't think for a minute that'd stop Pol." She pitched the cigarette stump into the grate. "No danger? 'S all you know. There's always danger. Stick around here in Las Reudas and San Vicente and give Pol Pollard a chance at you—with your mother backing her—and between them they'll get you into a position where you'll have to ask her to marry you—or seem like a cad if you don't."

"Zoe," said Julian, "What made you think I'd mind seeming like a cad?"

She laughed with nervous abandon.

CHAPTER XXVI

A WIDOW'S ONLY SON

THERE were no cars about the gate when Julian got home; he sent his own machine very quietly around the gravel sweep and up to the front entrance. Silence, except for the night wind through palm fronds, hiss and drip of water where the sprinklers were set at some remote point of the lawn.

Lights were still going in the big, empty parlours. As he signalled for the chauffeur to come and take his machine he saw obliquely through the open door of the little writing room a feminine figure at the desk there—Paula Pollard, a long light silk coat over her thin summer dress, her hat on the chair beside her, finishing up her notes of the meeting. She was secretary of the League. At sight of her so, with the characteristic gesture she made as she paused in her work a moment, drew the wrap about her and then went on writing, Julian standing outside in the night had vision of a dusty country road, a rickety old car trundling along it, carrying a noisy crowd, Paula, such a coat over a swimming suit, sitting beside him, Zoe Haslett on her lap. The old Cadillac came to a stop near the "Restlands" fence, where a little blue gingham girl waited. As though it were one of the night sounds there in the garden, he could hear Lynnie's, "Don't bother about me—it's all right," her cheeks blazing in pained embarrassment, and Paula's "No room in the car for her—no room," shutting her out.

Oh, here was the Jap for his roadster. He went on up the steps. No room for Lynnie in the car—or in his life. They had shut her out. And she had taken humiliation and defeat meekly—with bowed head—but he knew well that wherever she was to-night it wouldn't be at a pacifist meeting. The one thing he'd ever heard her boast of was a soldier grandfather. Lynnie—little soft, yielding thing—was the sort who could arm her man and bid him good-bye with a brave face.

Going in he picked up from the hall table, where his mail was always left, a day letter, and pulled it open as he stood there. It was dated Salt Lake City. He read:

"May be detained here some time. Had I foreseen this would have let you go in the first place. Know you are due in Juneau. Such estate matters as remain may safely wait your return. Hope this reaches you in time for sailing next Alaska steamer. Apologies and then some.

"Cass Hardwick."

Shoving the envelope into his pocket he started for the telephone, when Paula called:

"Come in a moment, Julian. Don't you want to hear about the meeting?"

He turned back to the door of the writing room, and stood there.

"Oh, I did wish you'd been here this evening!" She was flushed, excited. "The Prentisses finally got those Canadian people here to meet the League, and—your mother's given in. She's going to have the factory converted into a munitions works."

"Well—that's good," Julian said. "Still, I don't see why it should please a pacifist."

"Yes—of course—I am," in some confusion; "but the speeches to-night—those Canadians were very convincing. I suppose there are members of the League who still feel it inconsistent with—but most of us see things quite differently now. And Benchy said—after the meeting, you know—just speaking privately with your mother, that the factory will make at least two hundred per cent profit. You're going to be in it, aren't you?"

"No," said Julian. "I'm glad to have my mother do the right thing, but it won't affect my own plans."

"Oh," she didn't ask what those plans were, but finished, "then you don't feel that a work like this is practically the same as going to the front? Benchy says he does. Of course, the—the money wouldn't count with you, as it has to with him; but this is such a big thing—Oh, Julian, it'll make such an *enormous* fortune!"

He went on into the room and leaned there at the corner of the desk while she sat looking up, speaking to him rapidly,

earnestly; arguing, fairly pleading. He'd never before had a fair look at Paula's ideals; but now in her excitement she pitched them all out on the counter for his inspection. She hadn't much notion of business or public affairs; she just came back again and again, with raw simplicity—the munitions works would mean more money, more power, more social supremacy, at Coronado, San Francisco, Tahoe, Los Angeles, Pasadena; imported motor cars, bigger diamonds and more of them; the wall, the impregnable wall, of exclusion and immunity that a very great fortune builds. She spoke with a sort of pitying contempt of Calkins, who sacrificed the little he had to go to the relief work in Belgium, of young fellows they both knew with plenty of money who were already in France. "More fool they," was her fairly plain implication—when here was a chance to do something that would sound just as well, and make uncounted money. He had never seen her so stirred; she was fairly rapt.

And all the while he was thinking of the talk between himself and Calkins that day; terrible things his old tutor had told him, so that the war seemed to sweep into the little room where they sat and surround them with its living horrors. And afterward, when Calk spoke of Zoe, with what nobility he put aside the personal—the only factor that Paula could see at all.

"Oh," she finished. "I don't believe I'm making any impression on you at all! If you'd only been here yourself this evening to hear the speakers! I phoned everywhere, and couldn't get the least track of you. Where in the world were you?"

"Dining"—he hesitated—"with—Zoe Consadine."

She didn't say anything at all for a moment, then, sitting turned away from him, while the red poured over her face and neck down to the laces of the light dress, and the fingers on the desk trembled . . . hardly more than a whisper,

"I wish"—she looked at the papers before her, minutes of a pacifist gathering—"I wish," huskily, "I hadn't said a word to you about the—the meeting—or anything. I—I thought from the first you weren't like yourself. If it's something you heard at Zoe's"—she stole a glance at him—"and I know it is—it wouldn't be fair to— She's perfectly undependable. I don't think you ought——"

"Let's leave Zoe out of it, Paula."

"Leave her out? How can we, when she's run right to you with—with——?"

"With what?"

"Why, with her version of what was said that day here at the house. No—listen! I've got to set myself right. It was Zoe that started it—said she was going to go for you next. Zoe's in an awful state; it's almost a disgrace to be seen with her. I—you—marriage to a girl like that—I don't care how much money and family she's got—would shut a man out of the best society."

"Paula, what's all this got to do with you—or me?"

"Because your mother thought— We'd talked a good deal together about it—so, when she wanted to see Zoe— And . . . and then, afterward, Zoe came down to me—mad as she could be—perfectly insulting, and said what we were trying to fix up was a match between you and me." She waited a moment, then added, "And that's what she said to you this evening."

"Well, what of it?"

"Why, this," Paula squirmed: "She had a certain colour of truth for what she said. She—she said I was running after you and I was already secretly engaged to Benchy Prentiss." Again that interrogative pause, the swift, scared look, to see how he was taking it. Then, emphatically, "I told her that Benchy and I were absolutely nothing more than good friends. But when she asked me flat, in the most impudent manner, if you and I were engaged, I—I sort of let it go that we were."

Julian made an impatient movement, and repeated,

"What of it? This is all between you and Bench. If you choose to deny that you're engaged to him, and let Zoe think you're engaged to some one else, it's none of her business—or mine."

"But I've just told you that Benchy and I are nothing more than good friends." She got up hastily; her face altered. "I think maybe that's he now—he was to come back for me. I——"

A joyous foot was plunging up the steps three at a jump.

"Hello, Jule!" the red-headed one shouted from the porch. "Glad to see you here. She's told you"—Paula looked around with scared eyes, but he finished—"about the munitions? Great, isn't it?"

While they shook hands Paula began gathering her things together.

"Great!" Julian echoed.

"It's what we worked for. You fellows that are going to the front needn't think"—Benchy's tone had a little drop in it—"Anyhow, we're the men *behind* the men behind the guns. Gosh knows I'm glad to get in on it, even."

Julian watched him as, with apparent unconsciousness, he went up and laid a hand on Paula's shoulder, saying,

"I left 'em all in good shape at their hotel, girlie;" then to Julian, "I went down in the auto with that committee. Tell you, it sets me aflame every time I talk to those fellows. The way they look at it, all the good things, all the opportunities in this old world, are going to be for the men who do their bit—any kind of bit—in this European war. They say the chap that stays out is taking a hack with an ax at his chances in life—handicapping himself in the race of the strong."

"I'm ready now, Benchy." Paula's tone was even and colourless. She moved toward the door. Instantly Benchy scooped up her belongings, followed, caught her arm and swung her around.

"Hold on. Lemme tell Jule some more. America'll be in this war before we're done. Betcha the man that sits in the White House ten years from date is a chap that trained in a Camp at Del Monte or Plattsburg last year."

"Oh, please don't talk any more war," said Paula wearily.

"W'y, y' purblind pacifist!" Benchy smiled indulgently. "Don't you hear me tell you it's your chance? If I'm to—" He looked from her to Julian and halted. 'You wouldn't have a man that——"

"Oh, come on." Paula's face was a study in chagrin. "Good night, Julian," but she didn't look at him. As she dragged Benchy away the red-headed one was protesting in a hoarse undertone that he hadn't really let out anything.

Julian looked after them, then, late as it was, turned back toward the telephone and his own affairs. Bench was going to get her. Well, he was sorry for him.

He called for the home number of a young fellow he knew, who was in the Steamship Company's San Vicente office. As he waited for a connection, he saw his mother come downstairs. He

got his man, and the information he wanted, aware while he did so that she stood waiting. As he hung up, she said,

"You're going to get your boat, aren't you? Day after to-morrow—that's good—better than I'd thought." She moved a little nearer and sat down.

"Yes, Mother." He faced around toward her interrogatively. She answered his look with,

"I had a message from Mr. Hardwick, myself. I'd telegraphed him. He knew well enough you dared not risk the Alaskan climate in winter. I don't see why he—but if you go now, you can be back before there'd be any danger."

So she had known all along that Hardwick was not in San Francisco—she had known where he was.

"Danger," Julian repeated, with a little dry laugh. "I'm going to catch this boat, and I do rather expect to be in California again in the course of a month or so. But only because it suits my plans."

"There's no use talking recklessly, much less acting recklessly, Julian." She sat up straighter in her chair. "You're going into the climate that cost your Uncle Tom his life; you understand that very well."

"Excuse me, Mother—it's the other thing I understand."

"Other thing?" she echoed.

"Yes, I've known for two years that Uncle Tom didn't die of consumption, and how he did die."

"What?" in a startled tone. She looked almost comically discountenanced. Finally she said,

"I'll discharge Ben Dye to-morrow— He ought to be ashamed —a man I've done as much for——"

"Then he can go up to the mines when I do," said Julian quietly. "I wanted him and he wanted to go; but I intended to ask you first. I shall be glad to leave an old-timer like Uncle Ben there, if I should be out of the country."

She curbed her temper as he had never seen her do.

"Well, Julian," she said slowly, "hire my discharged employee, if you like. You're a man grown; you've inherited your money; you're quite independent of me—but I still feel responsible for you. I suppose this talk of possibly being out of the United States is what young Prentiss was hinting at this evening. He seemed to think he knew a good deal about your

plans. I've been told nothing. It's left to me to remind you in such a connection that you're a widow's only son."

"I suppose I am—formally." Julian was rather blank about it. His mother shook her head.

"It's hardly a formal matter—is it? If a mother has any claim to consideration it's because she goes down to the gates of death to bring her child into life. Formal—oh, no."

"Well, Mother," after quite a silence, "there seemed to me no use of quarrelling with you over my plans."

"You feel very sure we couldn't agree? I know in the past—in minor matters—we——"

"Just what do you call minor matters, Mother? Was there ever a vital issue on which we felt alike? When it came to the one great thing in my life, you failed me—you were against me—and you didn't stop at anything."

"Oh," she said on a long indrawn breath, and her eyes narrowed. "That's it—is it? When your father was going to send up for you, and was determined to leave you a fortune—without any restriction whatever—I would never in the world have given my consent if I hadn't supposed that was all past with you. The girl threw you over for money. That showed you what she was; it ought to have cured you."

"Yes. Two years ago. She took what you were willing to give her—poor little thing! You told her in my presence that if I went with her you'd kick me out—she'd be the ruin of me."

"You needn't accuse me of it all," she said sharply. "I didn't make the rules of society. Civilised people, however, do live under them. The social usage is that a marriage such as you wanted then to make is social ruin. If a thing like that had happened, I could never have held up my head again. Julian—can't you realise that any parents would act exactly as we acted?"

"No," said Julian heavily, "I saw what you did; but God knows I never had any understanding of how you could feel to make you do it."

"You hadn't? Well, I'm reasonable, Julian. I'll try to make it plain. I—I know that a young man—a boy at the silly age . . . wild oats," nervously . . . "and I suppose a girl like that, of low, common people, would have a kind of attraction. But say what you please, she was unchaste, and a man who attempts

to make a wife of such a woman will repent it—all—the days—of his life."

Julian sat staring down at his own hand. Once, such talk would have got from him only stubborn silence. He had lived a good deal since the days when that was true. He cherished no illusions about his mother and himself ever being much to each other; but at this, which was surely the parting of their ways, why not make at least an attempt to have her comprehend? They couldn't live together in peace—but they might part with some mutual respect and consideration, and without anger.

Memory of what followed was afterward very unreal to him. It was like a dream of his childhood when her approval or disapproval had lit the world for him—or darkened it—that he should be sitting here with his mother, finding words to tell her of his real feeling for Lynnie.

He began to speak slowly—in difficulties, almost from the first. His mother listened intently. It was not the objective history of his love and Lynnie's that he was telling; it was the inner truth. . . . A cruel advantage—so much money. They felt themselves of different flesh. . . . Poor little girl, that worked in a factory—hectored by a shrewish mother—

"She hadn't much education, no opportunities," he ended his brief, laboured statement; "but she was—she is still, wherever she may be—one of God's chosen. It's a heavenly silence and peace that little thing carries with her. She gave me my first understanding of what love—in its big sense, just pure human tenderness—might be. I was a poor, green, sensual fool; cruelly selfish with her; but—before she turned against me there at the last—there was a love between us, Mother, that you ought to understand. I got to thinking, years ago, that you didn't love anybody. I knew you didn't love me. But I saw—at the last—how you loved my father."

She sat very straight as he finished. He could not tell what went on behind the mask of her face; but he knew there was no comprehension there.

"I suppose," she said, measuring out her words, dry and hard, "that this means the end of any hopes I had of a match between you and Paula Pollard—a girl that's been like a daughter to me—that, if you weren't blind, you could see is every way fitted to be the ideal wife for you." She glanced at him sharply. "Let

me know the worst. Am I to understand that you'd still marry this person if you could—*marry* her?"

"Do I need to tell you that, Mother? Entirely beside the question of my love for Lynnie, my undying respect, my adoration for her, as I see it I'd have to take her off the streets, out of any degradation, and make her my wife—and I would—I would."

"That's enough." Mrs. McCulloch put up her hand. "I didn't think it of you. Your father believed it. The night he died he said——"

"Mother," he interrupted her without realising till afterward that he had done so, "when I got downstairs that night, McCurdy said father'd asked for me."

"Certainly. He had asked for both of us."

"But you were with him—you were there. What did he—say—about me? Was it something I was to do for him? No," he answered himself. "You would have told me if it had been that." She was silent, her eyes on his face as he finished slowly, "Then it concerned—just what we've been speaking of!"

"Why do you say that?"

"Because father had talked to me—about Lynnie—told me of her marriage; and I think he was sorry. He—asked me to forgive him."

"Oh, he told you of the marriage," she repeated, and stiffened at the words. Her face was full of pain, but wary, and the eye like flint. "It seems to me you know all there is to know."

"Certainly not. I've never been told why he called for me there at the last—and the nurse was prevented from bringing his message. I'm asking you."

"Well . . . you can ask." She got up, and he rose instantly. They faced each other, standing. "You're a hard son to me. Good night, Julian. I hope sleep may bring you counsel."

CHAPTER XXVII

A LETTER

BUT Julian seemed to be going to get no sleep that night. For hours he lay in his bed in that curious, alert state, neither sleeping nor waking, that seems to be a different dimension from either, a place where time is abolished, and the past has presence, as well as the future. Again and again he would reach out and pull on the shaded bedside light, to see the big, sober, elegant, man's room that was not his, yet was measurably familiar. All very real—commonplace; yet so soon as the light was out again that which it had displaced began once more to glide across his mental vision like a rapid river.

And he never could tell what he'd get: bits from his childhood, long forgotten; hours from those difficult—those terrible—years of adolescence when he was in one continued struggle with life as they were willing for him to have it; petty details of his preparations for leaving—that bundle of his father's clothes that should have gone to the Salvation Army; the collection of canes that he meant to send to Cousin Homer. Sudden vision of Cousin Homer's substantial, Middle West personality, the wife that inevitably belonged to him, when the will was read that day in the library, both chagrined, abashed, leaving the house in awkward haste; for, while there had been a generous legacy for them, his mother, with apparent unconsciousness, administered a withering snub. Well, well—the canes might help some there. Julian hoped so, sighing, turning on his pillow, wishing he could sleep. And at last toward morning he did fall into fitful dozing.

He waked with a sort of dry urgency upon him to be gone. All the uncertainty, all the option, seemed to have been taken away somewhere in that brief interval of semi-unconsciousness. The prospect, the actions just ahead, had strangely lost their relish; yet he could see nothing but to move vigorously on. Weren't the staterooms reserved for himself and Uncle Ben?

What was there to do but to go? He dressed, breakfasted, and finished packing, then rang for the boy to come and get the heap of his father's clothes that were to be sent out. When the Jap had staggered away, under the pile, he turned to the mantel where lay the few little things taken from the pockets, and stood giving them a final examination before burning.

The last item was a large white envelope; he knew what was in that; he had looked that over once. His hand was already relaxing to drop it on the blaze when, absently, mechanically, he drew it back and thrust in thumb and finger. This time there came out along with the two-year-old receipted bill of an Arbolado Street tailor, a small, thin, cheap-looking, tinted envelope, somehow feminine and humble in its appeal. With a little hesitation that was half apologetic he turned the new find over—and stood rigid, staring. Its address and postmark were identical with the picture post-card of Lynn, Massachusetts, that had lain in the library desk. He walked across and sat down before he dared to open it. Then with fingers that shook he pulled out the sheet—there was only one, folded awkwardly and with many creases—and read:

"*Mr. Stephen McCulloch,*

DEAR SIR: I write this to let you know how we are getting on, as I feel you have been a friend to us in our great trouble.

I know you must feel that you have done enough, and that I ought not to ask you for any more, but I might as well say first as last that we are in a tight pinch for money right now. Charley thinks we will come out all right, and do well; but at present what you paid over to us is all tied up.

If you could send fifty dollars ($50) for the doctor and the nurse it would help us out, as Charley's resources are all tied up at present."

Then, below the "Respectfully yours, Mrs. Charles Willis," in two scrawled lines,

"Lynn is doing as well as could be expected.
"It is a little girl."

When Julian came back to conscious, coherent thinking—and that seemed to be hours after he had read the postscript to Mrs. Charles Willis's letter—it was to begin readjusting all the facts

of his life since he first met Lynnie to this new and mighty fact. In the light of her necessity, all her actions were made clear to him. She had felt herself a trouble, a disgrace, from the time she knew what was before her; she would separate herself from him to spare him.

And the other man, in the East there—the one she was actually married to now— He came to his feet with the thought; his eyes felt hot in his head as he looked about him. They would have called her Mrs. something or other—a widow. This fellow would father his child, and Lynnie's—the child of their love—the "little girl." No. Not while he lived. He had a sudden clear pang of vision that he and Lynnie—and the mysterious child—were a family already; that nothing could really come between them, though he was by one ocean and she at the verge of the other.

He moved across the room toward the door. His mother had known this when she talked to him last night. She could give him the information that he must have now. He was downstairs and rapping on her door even while the thought was taking shape in his mind. He found her breakfasting in bed as usual, and bolted out before he had crossed the room,

"Mother, I want Lynnie's address."

She set her cup back on the tray with fingers that trembled so that the spoon rattled against the china, and stared at him.

"Julian, suppose I could give it to you, what sort of mother should I be to do so?"

"A different sort from what you've ever been—a better sort!"

"Julian!"

"You knew when you talked to Lynnie as you did—that day—down in the library—that there was going to be a child—my child. You knew last night when you held forth to me about the kind of wife a man owed to society that there was only one woman in the world I ought to marry."

"A child!" Her face flamed angrily. "*I* knew it—*I!* You're not going to pretend that *you* didn't know!"

"I'm not going to pretend—anything." Julian repeated her words. "Give me the address—or refuse to. I can get it elsewhere."

She sat up suddenly away from her pillows; the dishes on the tray slid and clashed.

"Do you think"—she fairly choked—"do you think I'd have anything to do with such a creature—or with you, if you go back to her?"

"That would be entirely with Lynnie." Julian put the question aside coldly. "She's not one to harbour a grudge; yet I don't see how she could ever forget or forgive what you did to her."

"And yet you'll ask me for her address!"

"Then you're not going to give it to me?"

He waited till he saw she did not mean to answer him, then without another word wheeled and left her. Who, now—unless it was his mother or Cass Hardwick—would know anything of Lynnie? Alma Bruckner—Alma Dye. The next moment he was at the telephone, calling up Thatch's Garage, and an hour later he was far on his way to San Pablo—driving fast. Thatch had gone down to Siloam to take Alma to her people, and the Bruckners, as of old, had no telephone. He had covered things as best he could in such haste, got Uncle Ben on long distance and told him he would find money at the steamship office, to go ahead when the boat sailed whether he, Julian, was able to make it or not. He had arranged for his own luggage to go to San Francisco, and be held there until he should find what direction he must now move in.

Despite reckless speeding, it seemed to him years before he swept into slatternly little half-Latin San Pablo. He took the shore road; out there was the bay, where the glass-bottomed boats plied, where Pret Consadine's launch had ridden that day; all so familiar—all so strange. It was like the return of an animal to the spot where it was bred—a homecoming of the heart. He drove by the autos standing for hire, such as he and Lynnie had passed that night here. This was the drugstore they had telephoned from; up there on the hill was the hospital. He turned the corner at the San Pablo Hotel. Leaving town, he went by the old Spanish cemetery, with its leaning headstones under the big oaks. From the moment his machine entered the highway for Siloam he was companioned by two wraiths—or rather he himself was the ghost that moved between the Lynnie and Julian of that earlier day. What a power this road had to take him back into the past! Every spear of wild oats, dry, sere,

dust-bowed by the way or in the hillside patches, had its own separate stab for his heart.

He left the Highway at the Mission. Inside, there, was the altar before which a poor, clumsy, ignorant fool of a boy had prayed the night long—and got no answer. Oh, God—if he had known!

In less than ten minutes he was going past "Restlands," shut, deserted—no Jane Jordan watching—you might go up to any of the windows at any time of day or night and tap on them. There was the field of wild blossoms, neglected, the hardy brush encroaching on it again. He could see very much plainer than he saw its tangle of brown and yellow, Lynnie's little blue gingham frock coming along the path. Lynnie's face, under the old straw hat, turned to him, Lynnie's eyes looked dumb reproach into his across the sagging fence—then looked away.

On past the little glade where their postoffice had been, to the crossroads; and the Bruckner gate was in sight. A mud-spattered roadster stood there, and down the walk toward it came a man carrying the unmistakable satchel of the doctor, Thatch at his elbow. They were talking together, and as soon as he was close enough, Julian was struck by something strange and exultant which he saw in Thatch's face. When the doctor had got into his car and away, offering assurances to the last that somebody would be "all right now," Thatch turned to shake hands with Julian, still with that curious, pale, uplifted look.

"My God!" he said. "What a night we've had here—what a night! The doc can talk about 'Eighty million people—and they all had to be born'—but—but when it's your own——"

So that was it. Julian realised now that he ought to have remembered.

"Thatch," he said, "I'm glad it's all right. I won't keep you. I've just driven down to ask, have you or Alma got Lynnie's address?"

Thatch seemed to come back from a long way to the question.

"Lynnie," he repeated vaguely. "Oh, yes—Lynnie Willis. Sure, Alma got the new address of the family at Bedford Center—that's where they went after they broke up in Lynn. You—you want to get track of your child." He looked at Julian with a new dignity of expression. "I thought you would, soon as you came into your money."

"I want the man's name," Julian said.

"Oh," curiously. "I don't know as I ever knew that. You might write to Mrs. Willis at Bedford Center; there's no street number; it's R. F. D. number three. But—say, Jule—I don't s'pose it'll do you any good."

"Would Alma have the name?"

"I—why, I don't know. Anyhow, what difference does it make?"

Julian stared silently.

"Say—she ain't married to that man. W'y, I don't believe you know a thing! That's what all the telegraphing was about the night your father died. I drove Hardwick out that night. I saw you. I could have told you if I'd supposed they was going to keep it from you——"

"Yes, yes. What?"

"W'y, that Lynnie'd left her folks—just disappeared—took the child and gone—to get out of that marriage."

"They telegraphed that to Hardwick—Hardwick?"

"No, your father, of course. But all business was going through Hardwick's hands then. Way I know is, McCurdy's our doctor up there. He was hot about it, and let the whole thing out to me and Alma. But I understood him to say that you was there at the last. I thought all along you knew."

Julian stood motionless; Thatch went on,

"The reason the Willises telegraphed to your folks was that they'd got the notion Lynnie's try to head back for this coast. That had your mother right up in the air. McCurdy said the argument over it that night killed your father.—And I've been thinking all this time that you was there!"

She had left her people—got away from them with a little child, a baby, and surely not much money. Suddenly Julian wheeled and started toward the road and his machine, almost at a run, Thatch after him, a hand out toward his arm, speaking low and hurriedly,

"I know something about how you feel. Might not yesterday —but I sure know to-day. There ain't another thing I can say to you. You'll make it, all right. Your mother and Hardwick, they'll try— But they can't——"

"Yes, yes, Thatch. Thank you. I've got to get back to Las Reudas yet to-night."

CHAPTER XXVIII

LYNNIE

BEFORE he reached Las Reudas, Julian saw his next movements fairly clear ahead. As he got down at the little Carnegie Library out by the Country Club he was impatient of the sidewalk's swimming under him; in the reading-room searching out in directories the half-dozen addresses he should need, the printed page showed a tendency to flow by his sight as the sidewalk had flowed past his feet. Well, he'd driven hard nearly all day; and he'd scarcely slept the night before. He'd be all right when he got quiet and had something to eat. Time enough for rest and sleep when he had things going.

He was standing writing telegrams in the Las Reudas station when the door of the main room opened sharply, a rapid step came across, and somebody immediately began a wrangle with the man at the window where Pullman space is reserved. Even through his preoccupation Julian was startled by the familiarity of that voice; but the first clear words he got were from the Pullman man:

"Well, do you want both sections?" he was demanding irritably. "You can't get the stateroom."

Julian glanced through a fringe of papers that angled the news-stand beside him; there stood the man who had telegraphed him thirty-six hours before from Salt Lake City, "Shall be detained here some time." The hand gripping the pencil waited over the telegrams while Hardwick, in default of the stateroom, grumblingly accepted and paid for two sections in a Pullman leaving Las Reudas! The lawyer pocketed his tickets and went past the news-stand like a shot, and without one glance. But through the window Julian saw his startled halt before the speedster, saw him go and take a closer look at it, straighten up, gaze anxiously all about, then whirl and jump into his own waiting taxicab.

Julian crushed the sheaf of telegrams together, jammed them into his pocket, and got across to the Pullman window in four long strides.

"I'm sorry, Mr. McCulloch," the official welcomed him apologetically. "If your mother'd even telephoned this morning—but to bump it on us this way—only two hours, and a transcontinental train—you know how it is——"

"Yes," said Julian. So his mother was going East! "Well, have you got a berth left for me?" he added, after a moment's swift thought.

"Sure," said the man, "if you'll take an upper."

When he jumped down from his machine at the house he was still annoyed—and now more than ever—by that swimming. He wished he'd dared stop for a good strong cup of coffee.

"Is Mrs. McCulloch here?" he asked the man who opened the door to him.

"Yes, Sir." The Japanese bowed and sucked his breath through his teeth. "Go 'way pretty soon. Trunk go now, Mr. Julian."

There was the panting of a motor truck in the side yard; he walked to the end of the porch, leaned around and looked down. They were loading luggage from the entry door. Coming back, he heard voices in the hall; his mother, speaking from the music-room landing to some one who seemed to be in that side entry through which the trunks went. She turned, saw him as he stood in the front door, and said in a suddenly raised tone, "Here's Julian." After that she halted for a moment, as though she had half a mind to retreat to her own room. But Hardwick appeared from the side stairs, took her arm in the most commonplace manner, and brought her on down, so that in a moment the three of them stood together in the hall. Julian waited.

"You—you'll miss your boat, won't you?" she faltered finally.

"It doesn't matter."

"Why—but—your things have all gone." She glanced at Hardwick, apparently for a cue. The lawyer came in with,

"Plenty of time yet to make the boat—if he wants it."

The Swedish girl who was Tatsu's successor appeared at the stair-head in travelling wear, loaded with her mistress's hand luggage and long black cloak. Julian's mother looked from the maid to his face, and finally seemed driven to say,

"I—you see, I'm leaving home myself—for a few days. A—a—called away— Business——"

"Yes," said Julian. "I see." And without a word of good-bye, or anything further, turned back to his roadster. The Pullman sections were for his mother and her maid. It would be better for him to take the train in San Vicente. Time enough for a settlement to-morrow on board. The fact that these Pullman tickets read to New York did not assure him that Lynnie was there; but he was sure that his mother had had Hardwick on the track; they had located her, and now she, with her maid, was going to her. This was the only reasonable explanation.

For the first time in leaving Las Reudas he took the more direct new boulevard to San Vicente. Never since the night of his homecoming, when he had turned and left the Willis house unburied in its open grave, had he been able to face the hollow back here. But now it had no power to hurt him; he was going to Lynnie; his heart leaped at the thought that a week of days might bring him to her. As he approached the arc light below which the Willis corner lay, he drove more and more slowly, and tried to look down. He couldn't see anything from the machine. A half block past, and slower yet. Finally he stopped altogether, left the roadster, and went back afoot. An hour and a half till train time. His impulse was to go straight down there and look at that place.

Yet when he came opposite, where a steep, twisting path led away, into the dimness below, he halted and his heart contracted. Up out of the obscurity there had reached him a small sound—just such a little sound as the sleepy birds used to make in the chaparral those nights when he and Lynnie were slipping home from their stolen trysts. Before he fairly realised that he had heard it, or had sorted out what it might be, or mean, he found himself running headlong down the embankment, angling away from the path straight toward the Willis gate, slipping, sliding, getting to the broken sidewalk in front of it in a smother of dust and rolling gravel.

The gate sagged open. He blundered on up the walk. Nothing here. Then, in the twilight, he became aware of a little figure that sat on the step there rigid, what looked like a small bundle lying beside it.

"Lynnie!" He caught her up, crushing her tight to him. For

a moment his eyes closed, willing it should be a dream, if it must. Then he set her down and held her off a little to look at her. His Lynnie in the flesh—all dressed in a threadbare, decent, pathetic best. As he gazed, only half believing, she whispered, chokingly,

"You—you've come for me."

He made no answer but to turn her face to the light and study it long. Under his scrutiny, the tears began to come.

"Julian—oh, Julian; it was good of you to see me—after all!" she said. "I'd never have asked it, Julian—you know that. I didn't come back to make trouble, but—I did want to see you once—and I thought you might like to see——"

Again that same little birdlike chirp that had led him to the spot. She stooped; his eyes, accustomed to the dimness, saw the deft, mother touch with which she lifted the sleeping child to her lap. She looked up at him then, and her voice, when she spoke, had a new tone in it, the mother tone,

"I called her Julia. You—you want to see her—this once—don't you? That was what you came for, wasn't it, Julian?"

"Yes." The words said themselves. Down on his knees beside Lynnie and her child, his arms around them. "I came for—you—both." He held his breath while she uncovered the little sleeping face.

"If she was awake, you could see that her eyes are the colour of yours, Julian," she said gently.

"Are they?" He laid a finger softly against the little cheek.

"Your mother said—you would be angry with me because I couldn't marry that—that man in Bedford Center."

No words for this. Lynnie's voice went on, "I didn't know your father was dead. I wrote to him—then I stole the baby and ran away."

A little while they sat, silent, Lynnie relaxed, her head upon his shoulder, the sleeping child across her knees. Then she stirred, and said, "Is—is it time?" Despite the mildness of her tone, there was a flaw of anguish in it.

"Time for what, dear?"

"Why, they're coming for me," she explained. "Your mother—she's taking me—us—to some place back East. I was to wait here for them. I thought they sent you—they told you—and you came here to—to say—say good-bye to me."

He tightened the arm around her.

"Lynnie," he said, "there will never be any good-bye like that between us while we both live. I'd have said that at first; but I thought you knew it—when you saw me. There never was anybody for me but you. I never really gave you up. When I found out—well—what had happened to you—there in the East—I was just starting out to hunt for you now."

There beside him, warm in the circle of his arm, she just murmured his name—"Julian—Julian."

Again a long moment of silence, while he thought out his immediate plans.

"Are you very tired, dear?" he spoke at last. "If not—San Francisco's the place for us now. . . . . Find everything there, outfits, and—and servants, and—everything you need."

"Yes, Julian."

"Before I knew this about you, I'd taken passage on to-morrow's boat for Juneau. Would you like to go—anyhow? We could, yet. We could cover everything, and make it. And it's where our main property is, dear—the copper mines."

"Oh, Julian—anywhere—with you!"

"Well, then," he said, and looked at his watch, "we'll start now. My car's just a little way up the boulevard. Let me carry the baby. You show me how to take her."

"Shall we go—without saying anything at all—to your mother?" she asked, as they began to climb.

"Yes," Julian answered.

But it happened differently. Before they reached the top they heard a softly purring motor halt up there, and the horn was sounded. As soon as they got a glimpse over the parapet, they saw the Japanese chauffeur, a Swedish maid sitting beside him, and the next moment Julian's mother opened the door and put out an anxious face, staring about her, demanding querulously,

"Where are they?"

The maid jumped down into the roadway, hurrying around the car, with,

"I'll go get them, Madam. Just below on the porch I left her. It will only take a minute."

"Well, be quick. Toyo, sound that horn again."

Julian took the last step that brought him into the roadway and fully into sight, the baby carried high on his shoulder, Lyn-

nie's hand nestled in his, just as his mother herself got out on to the sidewalk and tried nervously to peer over.

"What in the world should keep her!" he heard; then as she evidently got the silhouette of their group under the arc light,

"Oh!" She retreated to the limousine, grasped its open door, staring at them. "Are *you* here?"

"Yes. I'm here. At last."

No need now for explanations, apologies—or accusations. He saw her shrink a little at words and tone.

"I was only trying to save you from yourself!" she cried out. "But this—this— I suppose this means that you are going to marry her!"

"It does."

"Here? Where every one will know! Oh! You—Laura—Letty—whatever your name is—I forget—even you ought to——"

"Stop!" said Julian sharply. "It will be in San Francisco—as soon as we can get there. It won't concern you, or your friends."

She started to get into the car, but with her foot on the running-board turned to choke out,

"This ends everything— Never come near me— I wash my hands—" She broke off and pointed, ordering the confused chauffeur, "Throw those things out! Put them out!"

"Yes, Madam—yes, Madam!" ducking for something beside his feet, then passing down to the maid a battered old suitcase and a wrist bag. The girl came running and set them by Lynnie's side, whispering good-byes, her blonde face reddened with pained embarrassment. The chauffeur, watching like a puzzled terrier, added his uncertain, conciliatory,

"Good-bye, Sar. Good-bye, Madam."

"Drive on!" Julian heard his mother's half-strangled order to the Jap. The door slammed. Then as the maid ran back and barely scrambled in to the place, "Not that way, idiot! Turn and drive home."

Silently they watched the tail light of the limousine vanish around the sharp, upward curve. Julian stood there in the night, mute before the goodness of a God who had miraculously returned to him his lost world of love. Lynnie's small, work-

roughened hand tightened on his as she leaned forward to peer up and down the road.

"Julian," she said tranquilly, "I don't see the Go-devil anywhere."

He turned and looked at her, then stooped to lay his cheek against hers before he answered,

"It's another car now, dear. Just up here a little way." His free hand lifted suitcase and bag. "Just a little way," he repeated. "We'll walk."

And they started on, Lynnie moving step for step beside him, the mysterious child a soft, warm reality against his shoulder, its breath coming and going upon his neck.

THE END